# THE MYOPES

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## CHAPTER I

### THE ECCENTRIC MR. MOORE

A YOUTH and maiden, brought up together in the free-air intimacy which laughs at sentiment, walk in the Eden of our first parents, without self-consciousness. To become lovers, in the usual sense, is harder for such life comrades than for strangers. Old folks may beam encouragement, friends discern the aim of Providence to unite them: their candour interposes a barrier which only shrewd experience can overcome. Each needs a private lesson from the tempter, who here is the spirit of the outer world; while in the very nature of such lessons lurks the danger of their discovering too late all they are to one another. Anyhow, the awakening must be a shamefaced business, with sensations of a fall for both of them; or so it appeared to the mind of an old country parson fated to preside over a young couple thus becalmed.

The girl, Gertrude, was his own brother's child; the boy, Theodore, had been confided to him on her deathbed by the only woman he had

ever hotly loved; who, preferring at the irrevocable hour a lighter gallant, had paid the penalty of her inexperience in misery, desertion, and an early grave. Both orphans had been adopted as small babies and installed in his vicarage, to the stupefaction of a countryside; for he was then a bachelor advanced in years, and by closely minding his own business had earned the reputation of a queer recluse.

During ten years that he had been incumbent of Barford-le-Willows—a sleepy village in the heart of Norfolk—he had refused invitations wholesale, devoting every hour to be spared from the affairs of his cure to two hobbies—astronomy and the perfection of roses. In ten years he had restored a ruined church, had built and part endowed a village school. He visited his flock habitually without asking, did his utmost to relieve every want of the poor, and read the morning and evening prayers in church on weekdays — an activity rare at the period, which was offensive to the views of neighbouring clergy.

Any amount of oddity could have been tolerated in a man of his means, as the outcome of circumstances and not principle. Unhappily, the vagaries of the Rev. Hector Moore proceeded but too clearly from principle. They called for the ban. All unsuspecting, he had for years been ostracized and much maligned when his adoption of first one helpless infant, then another, wrought a moment's change in public feeling. There was a movement of pity towards him, feminine in its

inspiration. Voices of worldly wisdom, not unkindly, shouted to him the advice to marry. But, as usual, he was deaf, and went his way, unaware that in declining the good offices of certain neighbours he did aught unpardonable. He transferred his allegiance from the study to the nursery with no more reluctance than he would have shown in drawing up a blind.

He went his own way, too, about the education of the children, having ideas on the subject novel enough to excuse a growing horror in spectators. Theo and Gertrude were schooled at home, under his own eye, without distinction of sex whether at work or at play, until the girl was full grown, when he sent them abroad, separately, to receive the polish of convention.

It was then, feeling lonely and in need of friendship, that he first realized how completely he was outcast from such society as the district offered. But one man of a gentleman's rank came occasionally to see him—Ettrick Jones, his old college friend, the squire of a distant parish—and even that well-wisher used a tone of irritated remonstrance, hinting that there were bounds to eccentricity. Though sensitive to the cold shoulder, he did not ascribe to his neighbours any active malignity. He was eccentric, he supposed, while they were normal; and there was an end of the matter.

But one day he was rudely enlightened by a surprise visit from his ordinary, for which he could divine no pretext, till at length, with smiles and profuse apologies, the Bishop gave his reason

for inquisitiveness. He had been pestered with complaints from local clergy of the scandalous relations of Mr. Moore with his housekeeper. Now, having caught a glimpse of the lady and conversed with Mr. Moore, he perceived the charge to be ludicrous, and was going to blow up the ill-natured informers.

He seemed to think it a mere hoax, laughing heartily as he went out. But Mr. Moore was seriously annoyed. He was loth to dismiss for no fault whatever the woman who had mothered his adopted children, yet averse to retain her in a position which laid her open to such foul aspersions. In the end, after much deliberation, to her everlasting shame, he married her. It seemed a clear way out of the difficulty; and he rather enjoyed the death-shriek of all social intercourse. The bride was fifty, unseductive. She dared not show her face out of doors. But her husband assured Mr. Ettrick Jones, who bestowed on her the epithet which was in everybody's mouth—unpresentable—that he was now so near a better world as to prize a soul above its casket; that, however homely his wife's figure upon earth, he would have no cause to feel ashamed of it in paradise.

Gertrude and Theodore, informed by letter of these happenings, wrote in evident delight: they had always called her 'auntie,' she could never leave them now as she had used to threaten, and so on; and the contrast of those joyful letters with the general storm of reprobation struck Hector Moore very forcibly. It engendered in

his mind the fear lest he had made them heirs of his own unworldliness, and made him pray for a closer union between them, that, God willing, they might not inherit his isolation. His private means were sufficient, after provision for his wife, to leave for each of them enough to live on; his misgivings hardly touched the material outlook; but, from the peculiarity of their early training, he could not but foresee the risk of much unhappiness should they drift apart.

When the years apportioned to their foreign schooling had expired, he procured a locum tenens, and himself went to fetch them, taking them on a tour through Switzerland and North Italy before going home. His wife, who still kept clutching at her former status, could not be prevailed on to accompany him, but went to seaside lodgings in his absence.

There was a little mutual shyness at first meeting after so long a separation, but neither Gertrude nor Theo paused to value it. They eagerly scrambled back to the old familiar footing, and he looked in vain for symptoms of a budding passion. Theo aired some socialistic catchwords that had fired his brain, and Gertrude talked of books that had impressed her. They were always together, side by side, observing the same things and exchanging thoughts about them, quite without the desirable vision of one another. He longed to grip Theo by the shoulders, give him the half-turn round, and cry, 'Just look at her!' But the change, he had decided, must come naturally; he would not appear to coerce or even guide them;

and he was haunted with the dread lest it should come too late.

This fear increased upon him when he came to die until it wore the painful aspect of remorse. That he had been culpably eccentric over the education of these orphans, he now saw too plainly. His besetting sin through life had lain in over-indulgence of his private humour, which by that had become militant, a power in itself, which often mastered him. On his deathbed he was tortured with the thought that his singularity might so have coloured the mental training of his dear ones as to cripple them in dealing with the generality of men and women. Theo, who had been sent for from Paris, whither he had gone as an art-student, was at his pillow on the one side, Gertrude on the other. Holding the latter's hand, he explained his trouble, looking from one to the other, and asked their forgiveness. A smile of pure incredulity at his alarms cruelly confirmed them ; he saw himself glorified in their eyes, his blindness their guiding light.

When he urged them to keep together they smiled again with the same air of perfect confidence ; and again he sighed, perceiving how his sense escaped them. Almost his last utterance was a wish that he could have left them more friends. His last faint smile was addressed to the ex-housekeeper, crying her eyes out at the foot of the bed, in the servant's place.

## CHAPTER II

### INITIAL BLUNDERS

The executors of his will—Gilbert Ettrick Jones and Thomas Gravesey—attended the funeral of Mr. Moore, and afterwards held council in the interests of the bereaved.

Mr. Gravesey, a London broker of the solid, non-speculative class, acknowledged a debt of forty years to the deceased, for his soul's awakening. His mind was a hawk in mid-air, his manner pouncing, and his favourite argument was 'Stuff and nonsense!' He had, moreover, in the intervals of speech, a trick of loud snuffling with eyes fixed on an interlocutor, which, enhancing the general truculency of his demeanour, was especially hateful to his present colleague, the dilettante squire who loved refinement.

It was agreed that Theodore ought at once to return to Paris to his studies, and that funds should be advanced for the purpose. The widow was then called into consultation. With surprise they heard her tearfully announce her wish to seek employment—preferably in the service of some charity, as she could now afford to dispense with wages. Thus she would avoid being a drag upon the children, and might escape the painful

consciousness of her false position. She begged the gentlemen to believe that she had never sought this marriage. Much relieved by her sensible decision, Mr. Ettrick Jones promised her his wife's interest. Consideration of Gertrude's prospects was reserved for another time, as Mr. Gravesey had to get back to London, and it was in the mind of each old gentleman to secure her for himself.

Gertrude had proposed to go abroad and make a home for Theodore, till disappointed by her aunt's desertion. Through Mrs. Ettrick Jones the former housekeeper was offered the post of matron in a church orphanage established at Brighton, and accepted it, before daring to inform her niece. Gertrude, then, beholding Mrs. Ettrick Jones as the snake-head of a plot to sunder them, felt hostile when that lady called with offers of a home.

'I'm going to keep house for Theo,' she said proudly, standing at the French window of the morning room, and scanning the well-known winter landscape, which appeared somehow to have lost a dimension since her guardian's death.

'My love, you can't possibly!' cooed the grey-haired visitor, with prim lips and eyes of wide amusement. 'It isn't as if you were his sister.'

'I'm the same thing,' said Gertrude combatively; and when Mrs. Ettrick Jones made plain the difference, she felt sick at living in a world so evil-thinking.

The word 'marriage' took from existence all the lustre it had left. Like 'death,' it belonged in her mind to quite old people.

'So you'll come to us, dear, won't you?' pursued the envoy.

'I hardly think I can. Mr. Gravesey has written——'

'That horrid loud old man! My dear, you mustn't! There has been enough of oddity already in your upbringing.'

That remark decided Gertrude. She would go to London, to Mr. Gravesey, who, for all his terrifying gruffness, would never use that tone in talk with her. But she let her visitor depart under the illusion that her mind still halted. Making known her determination afterwards by letter, she drew on herself a more piteous visitation by Mrs. Ettrick Jones. But no expressions of great love for herself and Theodore could atone, in her present grief, for disrespect to the departed; and he was treated as a kind of madman. So she kept her resolve.

On the day when her aunt left Barford Vicarage for the scene of her new duties, Gertrude bore the good soul company as far as London, where, having separated her luggage and said farewell amid the clatter of the terminus, she went alone to Mr. Gravesey's house in Portman Square.

She had been there once or twice before with her guardian, on short visits; and remembered it as an abode of gloom and solid comfort, where servants grew fat and pale, strangely heedless of their master's growl. To-day, as she alighted from her cab and saw the door, she felt greatly daring as a child in act to rouse a sleeping giant.

But the giant, as it proved, was not within;

and a widowed sister, who kept house for him, put her quite at ease. When he did return, it was to stop her breath with the proposal, ogreishly made, to bear her off to Paris the following week. Thus obliged to look forward, she escaped homesickness.

The trip to Paris was a rapturous dream. Mr. Gravesey having business, she spent all the hours of daylight with Theo and a group of pleasant Frenchmen, his associates, who formed themselves into her bodyguard and encompassed her with devout observance. And when she returned to London in the humorously severe custody of her new guardian, she carried with her the delicious assurance that Theo was tired of art, and would shortly return to England, to study something else, no matter what—to be near her. With this in prospect there was no danger of her feeling dull in Portman Square.

Mr. Gravesey, however, failed to share her delight with Theo's change of plan. He sniffed aloud when she told him, and said: 'He's his own master.'

'But he's no good at painting — Monsieur Tessier and his other friends told me. They all consider he has talent, but not for that work.'

'Then why waste two years? . . . But there. I won't vex you. Better luck next time, we'll hope.'

He and Miss Gravesey persisted in using her as an honoured guest in their house rather than an established inmate. When she cried out on their too great kindness, wishing to serve them

somehow, they paid her compliments which made her blush. They found out her tastes and talents, and procured for her the best masters. And did she talk of setting up for herself, or so much as ask to be allowed to pay for anything, she was informed in blood-curdling tones that her money was all gone.

'Well, you're in clover,' Theo remarked at their first interview in the drawing-room of her new home.

He had come to London earlier than she expected, moved by enthusiasm for the degree of Bachelor of Science, which, he had been told, was worth getting and sure to lead to something else. She thought it cruel in Mr. Gravesey to say 'Pshaw!' and sniff at this project.

'Bachelor of what? What's the use in that? It isn't a profession, and the other was. You're drifting away from fact. Better come into my office.'

But Theo appeared nothing daunted. He found lodgings in Bloomsbury over against the Foundling Hospital. She saw him every day, and Mr. Gravesey made no objection to their wandering out together, merely indemnifying himself for the occasional loss of her by twitting Theo mercilessly with his science and his socialism.

The life she now led surpassed her previous imagining in its fullness of contentment. London took on hues of Baghdad in her walks with Theo. All he said was new and wonderful, and she little doubted but it was all quite true. She could not

comprehend his socialism; but neither did she understand the chemical composition of the small red disk up in the fog above the chimney-pots, which, notwithstanding, gave light to the world. It was part and parcel of the sun that warmed her. She failed to connect it at all with sad realities, could not see that it touched earth at any point. His prophecies of a golden age had the charm of fairy tales; and she listened breathless, but without desire for their fulfilment. Her golden age was the present, and he and all he thought belonged to it.

For about six months Theo was passably studious, talking willingly of electric mysteries and the queer behaviour of the heavenly bodies. But after that, his zeal flagging, those studies became the merest pretext, a kind of tent from which he sallied forth to tilt and foray. Disgusted with what he called the 'grey' socialism prevailing among youths in London, he strove in pity to indoctrinate a few of them with his own Parisian variety of the disorder, which was glowing and distinctly red. In this he succeeded wonderfully, having the prophet's gift to make a torch of anything the truth of which happened momentarily to strike him. He founded and inspired a small society, which he compared to David facing Goliath, having for its aim the destruction of all property.

Had the members of that fiery band but kept to themselves—as he wished them to do, for he was at heart eclectic—all might have been well. But they showed a pathetic eagerness for affilia-

tion to all that is most pestilent in the fermenting scum of a great city; and Theo, having set them off, was powerless to stop them.

Gertrude came to miss his bright word-painting of the millennium, and, looking, saw a cloud upon his brow. It was on the way back from a visit to her aunt at Brighton, in the second winter of his cult of science, that she plucked up courage to ask what ailed him, and he told her. It was a time of upheaval, and the police seemed vigilant. Meetings had been dispersed, an agitator arrested. He declared they were on the brink of a revolution, which he dreaded no less than did the Government. But his friends were pledged to take part in it, and he, their leader, must not fail them at the pinch.

Gertrude glared with him into the abyss of fire and darkness. She implored him to consult Mr. Gravesey, but he answered with a curt laugh, and bade her recollect that he had spoken in confidence.

The days which followed were, for her, most horrible, that secret heavy on her heart. Whenever Mr. Gravesey stormed over the account of disturbances in his newspaper, she felt guilty as a traitor in the camp. There were riots, shops were looted, traffic paralysed. Business houses in the heart of London were barred and barricaded, in a state of siege. The unheard-of panic swelled Mr. Gravesey's indignation to the verge of apoplexy. Fired with civil ardour, the old man enlisted as a special constable, and all one night paced the north side of Oxford Street,

challenging other gentlemen in the same ferment under depression of a choking, blinding fog. He paid for this patriotic demonstration forthwith in a severe cold, which made him still more bitter against sedition-mongers.

When Gertrude had to tell him that Theodore Moore had been implicated in the riots, and stood in danger of imprisonment, his wrath passed words. He called for his boots, assumed his hat and overcoat, and stamped out of the house, leaving his sister to comfort the heart-broken girl.

How he spent that day, into what arcana of the powers that were he thrust his wrathful face, was never known to Gertrude. But on his return at evening, too fatigued to bluster, he told her Theo would not be imprisoned. 'Though he deserves it, the young ass!' he flung out wearily. He must have exerted all his influence to the utmost, for she gathered that he had spoken face to face with the new Home Secretary.

The culprit was sent for, and Gertrude caught a glimpse of his haggard face in the hall as he went to the old man's study for execution. After an interval, which seemed of hours, he came to her, shaking himself somewhat like a dog from a wetting, fairly happy in the relief of survival. It was then that she learnt the whole extent of Mr. Gravesey's kindness Taking down the staff which he had carried as a special constable from where it hung on the wall of his study, he had shaken the same in Theo's face, and, after abusing him roundly for about a quarter of an hour, had

informed him that he was to join a commission presently to start for the Balkans, to ascertain the rights of some vexed question of a boundary. That grace had been obtained for him from the Government.

'It gives you a chance in the only wise thing you're good at—languages. And once you're out there, stay till you find your senses! Think yourself lucky, young man, to have escaped transportation in a very different sense.'

Theo reported these words with emotion, their dissembled kindness moving him to tears. Gertrude encouraged him to look forward, advising him to lose no time in finding out all that was required of him and completing his preparations. She soon had the satisfaction of seeing him once more cheerful. With Mr. Gravesey's sanction, she telegraphed for her aunt to come from Brighton and inspect the wardrobe of the traveller, and spent the days till his departure in a fluster of considerations which precluded grief. Her one idea was to get Theo out of England, which she pictured swarming with his enemies, and, seeing him off, she experienced immense relief. Soon letters began to arrive from him, written from the top of high spirits in the vein of a holiday schoolboy, and she sunned herself in the assurance that all was well with him.

But London was no longer in the least like Baghdad, and for the first time she was conscious of a sameness in the daily round of life in Portman Square. She found in all the objects of her gaze the queer inanity which she had observed on her

uncle's death, as if they lacked one dimension. The deficiency was in herself, she recognized. Something was gone from her.

The commissioners returned home in due course, but Theo remained in the East. A long letter, posted at Constantinople, announced his eagerness thoroughly to explore Asia Minor, and perhaps Syria and Mesopotamia.

'It's too fascinating,' he wrote. 'Impossible to explain. You would have to be here beside me, to understand. It is life in a grand old parable.'

Mr. Gravesey approved of this project, saying:

'He'll learn more there than he would at home. And he's out of harm's way. The parable's high Tory.'

And Gertrude endeavoured to resign herself, beginning to suspect that she had seen the best of life.

It was at this time, when she was feeling desolate, that Mr. Gravesey's nephew, Captain Elphinstone, first called at the house. She had often heard her guardian mention him, with pride at one time, when he was mentioned in reports from Burma, then with pity as an invalid, and lately with gnashing of teeth as one going headlong to the dogs. 'Drink—and worse, drugs!' she had heard. 'Poor Harry! He caught a fever in those Irrawaddy swamps which broke him utterly—took all the manhood out of him.'

In the flesh she beheld in Captain Elphinstone a remarkably handsome individual of the middle height, not much past thirty, yet beginning to look old through habits which he himself seemed

to regard with lothing. Partly because she had never before enjoyed the opportunity of studying a fellow-creature in that sad predicament, but more because she was in need of some charitable object for an outlet to her hoarded tenderness, Gertrude took the friendliest interest in this derelict gentleman. He called again and again, made her the confidante of all his troubles. He wept easily when describing his own wretchedness, giving her the precious gift of sympathy, stringing her nerves to an Æolian harp, whose music charmed her. He begged the help of her hand to escape from the slough into which he had plunged suicidally. She was his star, his guardian angel, his one hope—and, having never before been addressed in such terms, she was struck by what he said, and blushed, and faltered.

Mr. Gravesey reasoned with her, pleaded, remonstrated, and ultimately, finding her inexorable, threatened to lock her up. Would she sacrifice a wholesome life just beginning for the sake of that hopeless wreck ? and so forth, and so on. She obstinately insisted on marrying Captain Elphinstone, and, when her old friend still refused his sanction, stepped out one morning past a servant scrubbing the steps, and joined her lover, by appointment, at a church close by. Mr. Gravesey, an hour later, waxed hysterical over the note left for him—a conveyance, as she thought, of her whole fortune in consideration of his past kindness.

The thought of Theo clutched at her without

arresting, as that of dear ones rushes through the mind of one who risks his life to save a passing stranger. With a noble end before her, she mistook her fervid self-devotion for true love, which, she had yet to discover, is a widening estuary, with no end other than its bright horizon. She saw her mistake when, after six months of exciting struggle, her end was gained, and she was bound for life to a nerve-shattered, fretful hypochondriac. Pity had always from a child been her maddening emotion, the only one that made her lose her head. It was the weakness she had most to fear, and she had mistaken it this once for strength, to her lifelong punishment.

Harry, the reformed, was a tiresome charge. He required humouring, like a child, at every turn. Immoderate in self-denial as in his previous indulgence, he espoused a militant total abstinence which made him irritable. He even, as a chair against the door, renounced tobacco, burning all his pipes. He would live nowhere but in a certain stuccoed villa at St. John's Wood, which he had inherited from his grandfather Elphinstone, a rich tradesman, who had built it for rural retreat in days when the neighbourhood was a smiling suburb. His childhood had been spent there, and he fondled every link with his childhood, clinging now to the memory of that early innocence in endeavour to forget the years between.

Mr. Gravesey came to see her there forgivingly. All Harry's friends and relatives tendered their thanks to her for his salvation; and she thanked

them in return, but thought miserably of Theo. She knew him now to be the only man she could have endured for husband without shame or weariness. Theo in his letters had developed a shyness since hearing of her marriage; he delayed coming home; perhaps he, too, had realized.

As the months passed on, bringing no abatement of her husband's difficult humours, her soul revolted from so harsh a lot. Daily he discovered some new fault in her, and as often repented with unmanly tears. She led him to bear the thought of a modified separation, one that, while giving her room to breathe, would still allow her to watch over him; and Mr. Gravesey supported her in this demand, while shaking his head over the whole bad business. Though Harry was slow to decide, they had got to the discussion of minor details, when a letter arrived from Theo announcing his start for home. It was dated from Smyrna on the morning of his departure by steamer for Venice, whence he intended to traverse Europe. He hoped to see her very soon.

Reading this, her burden fell from her. Harry, sitting opposite at the breakfast-table, and grumbling as usual, became all at once an object of affection. There was sunshine, music, in the street without, and the town murmur lost its note of sadness.

He was coming by a short route overland. This letter, written on the day he started, had arrived; so he himself might be expected any minute. Her husband, who loved puzzles, routed

out a foreign Bradshaw, and, having pored and pondered over it two solid hours, declared that Theo would reach London that same evening. By that time his excitement was not less than hers.

Forthwith a telegram was dispatched to Brighton, in response to which, about two o'clock, her aunt appeared, all eagerness, in her sisterhood garb. She had obtained leave of absence for three days by the kindness of the Superior.

With her Gertrude set out to meet the afternoon boat-train at Victoria, all her troubles dissipated, all wish for a separation clean gone from her mind. With Theo at hand, all would be bearable. But the pair returned, disappointed, half hoping to find him at the house before them.

Again Harry pored over the foreign Bradshaw, nourishing fresh hopes, which leapt to joyous certainty, and again were disappointed. The three days' leave of Sister Ada was consumed in the thankless task of meeting Continental boat-trains, now at Charing Cross, now at Victoria. On the evening of the third day she returned to Brighton, convinced that her boy was either dead or dying; and Gertrude also was feeling despondent.

At length, five days after the letter, came a card bearing the postmark 'Domo d'Ossola,' when Gertrude experienced the sharpest disappointment she had ever known. He was not hurrying at all. He was going to 'sledge the Simplon,' and reminded her of a drive over the

same pass with their guardian years ago—as if she could forget! He described the weather—showery—and hoped to see her 'before very long.' How like Theo! Her mind comprehended him now in a flash, discarding ancient worship. There was no diminution of love, but the love changed nature suddenly, gaining in tenderness what it lost in splendour.

She could see him clearly at present, mooning sentimentally along the road they had travelled when they first came together after separate schooling. There had been just a taste of flirtation in their intercourse at that time, which had soon vanished under the eagerness of both to regain the old free comradeship. Now Theo must go over the same ground in sad remembrance, a willow-wearing pilgrim, as if she were dead. While she stood here in the flesh, awaiting him, he hung in attitudes above the lifeless past. It was too provoking! He was bound for Montreux, of course, for they had stayed some days in Montreux, and the place was gay at this season. He, the slave of chance, might find distractions there; when she, who had waited long, might wait longer. Visions of the red-hot socialist enjoying himself at Montreux with the rest made her smile momentarily, but the general tenor of her thoughts was very sad.

## CHAPTER III

### A RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS

The object of her thoughts meanwhile had plunged into the mild diversions of a Swiss pleasure-haunt. In his first walk down a parade of cut-purse shops, which sparkled with the lake under a fair blue sky, he had run up against his friend, Paul Tessier, the French painter, into whose cynic ear he proceeded to pour thanksgivings for the sight of English people.

The place swarmed with them—healthful, bell-voiced, overbearing. He vaunted a Roman's pride in their very loudness—the easy insolence of a dominant race. Here were aged dames bearing faces open and intelligent, girls with fearless eyes, as frank and unconstrained as noble boys. Could Paul but see some women of the parts he came from—the leer of youth, the slavered lips of age—he would thank God, as Theo did, for the light of freedom on a woman's brow.

The Frenchman stopped his ears.

'Now listen, Theo: I have been to London; I have seen the god of London—your policeman. At night he carries on his belly a lamp to show up all things save himself—that is your English humour. I pluck the lamp from thy girdle, and

turn it full on thee. What astonishment! . . . Thou, Theodore Moore, socialist, almost anarchist, as I have known thee, to chant the praise of society and extol thy fair compatriots of the class rich! Shame on thee, volatile islander! And yet, in a sense, thou art the same—still a prey to quite groundless excitements. We note here, messieurs, a simple change of illusion. . . . Thy great gold beard is my solace, assuring me thou art not all conventionalized. To-morrow I shall paint that beard of thine—something historic, or, at any rate, barbarous—Attila, or Odin, or St. Peter young. One longs to stroke it. It is a fortune.'

Theo laughed, and asked his friend to dinner. Paul fluttered a hand in acceptance as, consulting his watch, he hurried off. Theo laughed, but felt discomfited, the enthusiasm gone from his lonely musings. Paul's scepticism and the shrewd personal thrust had spoilt his cocoon of spun illusions.

Beginning then to take thought for appearances, he noticed in his gait—or was it fancy?—a roll like that of the returned seafarer. English people were laughing at him, he was shocked to perceive—not smiling friendly, as he had before imagined, but really laughing despite themselves. It was mysterious, most uncomfortable.

Was it his clothes? This suit had been the boast of a modish Greek tailor at Antioch, whose image, cross-legged in a kind of cave, came flushed before him, a protesting witness. It was reasonably new, and had passed muster on the

journey. His hat, purchased at Venice, must be acceptable, he considered; his boots were whole and black, and mercifully hid his socks.

Panic increasing with the mystery, he passed by the fashionable tea-shops, one of which he had meant to enter. They were packed with English, boxes of the laugh against him. Seizing the first opportunity to escape from the promenade, he entered a narrow lane which mounted steeply. It led to the old church, looking down from a height on all that vanity. Up there, on a seat of the shaded terrace, with the twitter of evening birds about him, and a grand panorama for refreshment, he examined his grounds for discomposure.

The experience of those pleasure-seekers, the round of goldfish in a bowl, could furnish no example of a plight like his. The step from inmost East to utmost West was into a new element—another world. Those English lounging in the Vaudois pleasure-town stood, in truth, for a world as far removed from the Oriental as that world is from man before the Fall. Pleasure, love, all human interest there was objective always; here subjective. The gulf fixed had not always yawned so wide. The castle of Chillon there below, knee-deep in the lake as cattle stand, was of the old time, neighbour to the life he came from. It seemed one with the natural scene; whereas the modern ballet of hotels and villas, smirking, pretentious, was thrown up by the landscape as indigestible. Europe somewhere in the eighteenth century had sinned again

as Adam sinned, and fallen as Adam fell. A fresh wave of the knowledge of good and evil had shaken the West, sweeping men and nations off their feet, with the old result in a burning self-consciousness, a rush to hide identity in regimentals, the dread of presenting a decided form to the eye. It was the burial of the individual and his shrieking ghost in the guise of a painful subjectivity, a thirst for mental originality, quite hysterical. And then the cry for the old unconscious beauty, lost for ever, gone the moment one would admire it, like Psyche's lover. . . .

Moore compared himself to one at the gate of a howling madhouse, drawn to enter and assume madness, if he could not feel it, just for company.

In a trance he beheld the sunset blush upon the wreath of mountains at the head of the lake—clouds of rich purple capped with rosy snow, crisp against a sky already dreaming of the stars: the whole reflected, line for line, colour for colour, beneath in the still water—a true mirage. Forms came black between him and that loveliness. His solitude had been invaded while he mused. There were words of applause: 'Gorgeous! Magnificent! Too heavenly!' He gathered he had chanced upon a point of view. 'What an appalling beard! Did you notice?' said a girl's voice on his left, receding.

In a trice he was all self-conscious. It was the beard, of course. Had not Tessier harped on the beard as an enormity? Now that he came to reflect, he had not seen so big a beard on any

man ; only the aged seemed to wear beards at all. These free men and women were all in bondage, he might have remembered. Their taste, speech, manners, turn of thought, the cut and colour of their clothes — everything was prescribed for them by their invisible lord—in essence that very self-consciousness to which he was now a prey—at whose nod they would turn in a twinkling and hate what they loved before.

With cheeks aflame, he slunk back into the town, seeking a barber's shop as the bemired seek water. When Paul Tessier came to his hotel to dine with him as arranged, the Frenchman shrieked for horror of the transformation. In place of a grand barbarian, he beheld a smooth-cheeked Englishman in evening dress, and was loud in remonstrance.

'Thou sayest all must conform ? Look at me, then—me ! I care not *that* for opinion ! I laugh at the world !'

His fingers snapped at arm's length, and then clenching, smote his chest, as he struck a posture of defiance—a demonstration which, happening to coincide with their entrance into a crowded room, had wide publicity. Talk round the lighted and flower-decked tables died away, as all eyes turned on the demonstrator. He, no whit disconcerted, bowed to the company ; but Moore felt the blade of that collective stare and of the suppressed laughs, the guarded comments, which marked the revival of conversation.

Seated apart with Tessier, he surveyed the assemblage. Every face there was marked Eng-

lish; he caught John Bull glances aimed at his friend. What gadfly stung such people to forsake the vaunted home and air their prejudice in foreign travel?

At the nearest table sat a party of three—two broad-backed men in evening dress, and a girl with a splendid diadem of hair, not red, nor yet auburn, but something of a darkness flushed all over. Theo was moved to look hard at the girl by a fancy he had seen her in the afternoon, till meeting a glance of equal curiosity, he was abashed. Paul, with napkin under his chin, crumbling his bread, observed:

'The two messieurs tire mademoiselle with their heavy joking. She is abstracted, gazing in the future, curious, like a true virgin. Dieu, what fine tragic faces!' He gobbled a pinch of breadcrumbs.

'Why tragic? Say!'

'Because they are tragic, all that kind of people—wilful myopes, seeing small things great; they miss the comedy. Now we, my Theo, who observe them, with such rare perspicacity, are comic—I diabolico-comic, thou angelico-comic—*in secula seculorum.* I speak of results, of eventualities. Is it clear, hein?'

'Scarcely,' laughed Theo.

'It's disgusting, the obtuseness of this islander. How goes thy cousin, the delicious Gertrude?'

'Alas, she is married!'

'Ah, my heart! With whom, then, if not thee? She loved thee only, it was legible. Why wouldst thou not content her?'

'She never asked me.'

'Did she ask the other, great imbecile?'

Moore hypocritically denied that Gertrude's love for him had ever at any time surpassed the comrade's; for fondness of his opponent's theory, he hugged his own. Paul cried out on his blindness, and there ensued a discussion which carried them far from the clatter of knives and forks, the hum of small-talk. Theo confessing a lover's abject misery, Paul wrought nobly to uplift and cheer him, making lightning-play with eyebrows, shoulders, hands, his whole body tortured in the fire of sympathy.

At length came a pause, when they were once more open to impressions from the scene around them. From lamps, white napery, a flash of plate, the congregation of bent backs and munching faces, the eyes of both returned to dwell upon their nearest neighbours.

The men were now in fits of laughter; the girl of the wondrous hair, with crimson cheeks, intent to silence them, was infected by their mirth against her will. Their eyes kept veering round for a peep at Tessier, and each peep was father of a fresh explosion, napkin pressed to mouth. Doubtless the little painter's gift of dumbshow, combined with his satyr-face and loose apparel, had set them off.

Scanning the room once more in annoyance, Moore perceived a general turn in Paul's direction, and that laughter was not confined to the one table. Hot and uncomfortable, he addressed to his friend a remark meant to engross his atten-

tion, but it passed unheard. Set bolt upright, a flame in either cheek, Paul was twitching his moustache with an eye to the merrymakers, whose backs were towards him. Theo met the girl's look, charged with a direct appeal. Determined at all costs to restrain Paul, he leaned forward; but in the same instant the Frenchman left his chair.

'Paul—for the love of God!'

His whisper came too late. One of the jokers, touched on the shoulder, had turned a countenance struggling for gravity, which grinned stupidly on a demand to be made acquainted with the cause of mirth; and the grin put Paul beside himself. Theo closed with him, putting forth all his strength; the girl was on her feet, the picture of shame; people sprang up from the other tables, chairs were overturned, a glass broken; waiters scurried to and fro like frightened fowls.

An elderly man of soldier-like aspect came to Theo's relief. He appealed to that fine courtesy which ennobles the French among nations. Monsieur should have the fullest apology, and, if need were, reparation afterwards; but now, at dinner and before ladies, was not the moment to seek redress. He was sure, he said, of being understood by a Frenchman.

The effect of the international compliment was magical. Paul subsided. In his own place again he kept silence, looking crestfallen. A shrill buzz of indignation filled the dining-room, accusing him, the culprit; nor could Theo see his way to make a nice remark, though more amused than

angry with his old friend. At length, when dessert was set before them, Paul groaned:

'Have I been foolish, great God? Have I furnished enough of a spectacle?'

'Diabolico-comic!' chuckled Theo; and set him smiling on the brink of tears.

'I lack the phlegm—call it self-control—the armour of thy nation. I have no business here.'

'No more have I. I ought to be in England at this minute.'

They looked straight at one another, or else down at the cloth, never venturing to glance at that other table, though aware of every movement of its occupants. The three had risen and were holding council. When the girl came straight to Theo, dismay made a perfect blank in their sensations.

'My brothers have ordered coffee in the lounge. Will you and your friend join us there presently?'

Before they could find a word between them, she was gone. The room emptied apace. Waiters began to dismantle the vacant tables.

On an exchange of glances, part humorous, part apprehensive, they pushed back their chairs.

At the door a tumult smote their ears. Out there, in a hall slightly furnished, all who had partaken of the dinner were gathered round a seated group of three. It was a babel of tongues, chiefly feminine, wagging to every pitch of indignation, rage, and horror. On their approach, as at some sight of fear, the uproar ceased, the furies all dispersed.

The same old soldier who had before inter-

vened, somewhat officiously performed the introduction, naming the insulters, Mr. Cumnor and Mr. Jack Cumnor, and himself, Colonel Oldfield. Finding Paul spoke a little English, he discreetly withdrew; while the two well-grown cleanly Englishmen, boys still though close on forty, took Paul between them and made much of him. Moore was left standing, unregarded.

'How well you speak French!' The girl's voice released him from a closing embarrassment. She was fanning herself assiduously, though the hall was not overheated. 'You're English, aren't you? All dinner-time I was debating whether you really could be. Please sit down.'

Moore needed no further encouragement. Before he was well assured of his seat beside her, he had begun the narrative of his arrival, his rapture in the midst of English people, and the disconcertion leading to the sacrifice of his beard. Her amusement was great and full of sympathy; the laugh together made them intimate. She told him she had been at this hotel through the winter, but her stepbrothers had come for six weeks only, at the end of which they were to take her home. Nearly all the people he had seen at dinner were, like her, old stagers. Only in the last few weeks had there been room in the house for chance comers, and it was etiquette to bar them, so he mustn't mind.

On his showing alarm at this last piece of information, she laughed and promised to befriend him.

Her brothers, long ere this, were waxing restless, often turning from their laugh with Paul to frown at the enchantress, who was blind to signals. Theo gathered from such looks that they desired his room. He had managed to catch Paul's eye, and was casting about for some respectable cloak of withdrawal, when an old lady who had been conspicuous for her pomp at dinner, entered the hall and drew near to them.

'Can't you make up a set, Lady Pettigrew?' his charmer inquired.

'We are playing,' replied the elder lady with acidity.

She put up her lorgnette against Theo, then let it fall as if from lassitude, and addressed Miss Cumnor:

'Olive, love, I want to speak to you.'

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LOT OF THE STRANGER

Next day Moore was surprised to be treated like a pariah in the hotel. Colonel Oldfield and his daughter talked to him at breakfast, but after that he met icy looks from every one except Miss Cumnor, in whose friendliness there was a dash of bravado. Over a desultory game of billiards she warned him to look out for disagreeables, since she knew for certain that Lady Pettigrew disapproved of him.

'We had a skirmish last night, which she won't forgive in a hurry, about my talking to you. I'm afraid she'll make you pay for my misdeeds. She sat up late with Eustace and Jack, hatching something amiable. We shall see their game presently.'

Moore assured her that the opinions of Lady Pettigrew, or any other old dowager, were to him a matter of complete indifference, whereupon she looked pity on his ignorance, and renewed her warning. He found her manner a trifle domineering. Though glad of some one to speak to, he did not require protection, and felt relieved when, after lunch, she developed a headache and retired, leaving him to face the enemy his own way.

It was a spiritless day, steady rain from the dawn onward. Instead of the famous view of lake and mountains, from the windows of the public rooms nothing could be seen but a sullen lip of water pitted with rain, and some half-grown trees in the hotel gardens watching over it like shrouded mourners. The dullness without was, in his case, figurative of that within. He saw that he had made bad choice of a hostelry, but meant to abide by it now and tire unreason. He had given these people no ground of complaint against him.

'A low brawl before ladies in the middle of dinner! No ground of complaint?' they would have screamed. What but the presence of mind of Colonel Oldfield had prevented the shedding of blood in the sacred presence—blood, as unthinkable at a feast of the refined as a foul word or a landlord's call for rent! Excuse could be made for the foreigner, as of race excitable; never for the strange Englishman, regarded as owner of a sort of monkey, who had brought in the mischievous creature to disturb nice people at their meal.

Lady Pettigrew was the public sense incarnate; it was the secret of her sway. She took the collective grievance in her hand at once, and made of it a sceptre to be obeyed. Moreover, she had private cause to mistrust this stranger, on account of Olivia Cumnor, a girl entrusted to her care by parents whose friendship she highly valued.

A man unrecommended, whose name in the big

book in the hall conveyed nothing to anybody:—what could be more indiscreet than for a maid to smile on him? In the hotels she patronized she had done her best to preclude this awful risk to chaperons by filling them for the season with her own allies—people she knew, unexceptionable, well-bred people; among whom she could smile on budding love-affairs, as she did upon Jack Cumnor's suit of Mary Oldfield. Every stranger was accursed in her sight. Dread lest Olive should contract an undesirable intimacy with the man Moore made her cruel in her determination to get rid of him.

Questioning Colonel Oldfield, who admitted having parleyed with the foe, she heard with impatience a harmless account of him. He had been out before breakfast in the rain, which the Colonel considered virtuous, and appeared nothing worse than unsophisticated. Lady Pettigrew pished at the description; it told her nothing. All the Colonel had gleaned, to the point, was that the creature sprang originally from a parsonage somewhere in Norfolk, where it sometimes rained like this.

Possessing a friend in Norfolk, the widow of a county magnate, she wrote to her then and there on the chance of learning something. She then sought out the brothers Jack and Eustace, and laid her commands on them to be civil in avoiding the man Moore. The intelligence of those middle-aged youths frisked in a paddock, needing the curb of her discretion to prevent horseplay. Ere noon every one of her adherents

had received the like injunction. Even Colonel Oldfield and his daughter, more benevolently disposed towards the victim, subscribed to the boycott, not averse to the spectacle of an ordeal by fire, their man on his mettle.

At night Colonel Oldfield was able to report some uneasiness of the victim, who had gone out directly after dinner, presumably to confer with his foreign friend.

The rain continued on the following day, and Olive kept her bedroom opportunely. At half-past four in the afternoon the Colonel came to Lady Pettigrew, then at her tea in the glass veranda, exclaiming:

'It's too bad! Some wag has removed every book from the library, and all the papers are either hid away or ostentatiously in use. He asked me just now, with a laugh, what sort of people we thought ourselves in this hotel. I replied, "Nice—among ourselves," and he said, "So are hornets!" That's not bad. He keeps his temper. I incline to think him a good fellow.'

'I ask to be convinced of that—by his departure. No man in his senses would stay in a hornet's nest.'

'Not if he'd been dared to?'

'Where he isn't wanted! A gentleman?'

'It hasn't been put to him prettily. A shove is the very opposite of a request—to a gentleman. And really, come to think of it, what right have we? . . .'

'Oh, really, if we come to right!' sneered Lady Pettigrew.

They were still upon the right of the case when one came hotfoot to relate how she had that minute seen Miss Cumnor sally forth in company with the outlaw, quite shameless, even calling out the name of the *pâtisserie* where they were going to have tea. The informer hurried off to other rooms, wild-eyed, the bearer of a fiery cross.

'In all this rain? She can't have been very ill,' was Lady Pettigrew's comment. Turning to the Colonel she inquired: 'Where's Mary?'

'How can my daughter be of use?'

'She might go with one of the Cumnor men—say Jack, he's the most peaceable—to the same tea-shop, and join parties. It would save the situation.'

'I'll take her myself.'

'So good of you!' sweetly murmured the providence, her plan to kill two birds with one stone being neatly frustrated. She had to meditate a change of tactics.

At dinner that evening, Mr. Moore, who sat at a table by himself, was the object of her covert speculation. Thus isolated, and beneath her glass, his inoffensive, nay wretched, appearance gratified her. At the end of the meal she made Olive present him, and said:

'Mr. Moore, I'm going to carry you off—to the salon. We're all dying to hear those adventures which have so charmed Miss Cumnor.'—She shook a playful cap at Olive, murmuring: 'Poor Desdemona!'—'Now be a charitable man, and enliven our evening, so dull generally.'

She triumphed, taking the public foe captive

and leading him away, bewildered, to her prepared circle. There he cut the desired sorry figure, having truly, when it came to the point, nothing to relate, or not knowing how to begin; rendered sheepish by an audience which applauded stammers, crying 'Yes!' and 'How interesting!' gasping to hear more.

The women had armed themselves with needlework, the men gaped upon him with their mouths. In the end he gave it up, saying he was no lecturer. A guffaw from the male, with a ripple of more decorous mirth from the feminine part of the audience, hailed this avowal.

'I hate lectures,' remarked Mary Oldfield, a girl of plain features but most graceful figure, mistress of a tone of voice so sweet that when she spoke it seemed all others jabbered. 'I shall get Mr. Moore to tell me privately.'

'Desdemona the Second!' tittered Lady Pettigrew.

Some one exclaiming on the beauty of the night caused a rush to the windows. Most of the men had departed, the fun over. Jack Cumnor, ever attendant on Miss Oldfield, was teased unmercifully by the group of girls under colour of eliciting his precise views on stars and other glories of the firmament. Lady Pettigrew and her victim alone remained seated, facing one another, when the dame looked up from her crochet-work and bent towards him.

'Go and have a smoke, Mr. Moore; I'm sure you must be dying for one,' she observed, with pleasantry in her voice and in her eyes.

That was his honourable release. Persecution of so harmless, shy a creature had been ridiculous, she perceived. She advised the Cumnors to make friends with him, just letting him know that Olive was no heiress.

But Theo harboured no designs, whether mercenary or only amorous, upon Miss Cumnor. Paul teased him about her, bidding him have a care; but that was nonsense. Their intercourse was a comic warfare. Her expecting him to bear eternal malice against Lady Pettigrew and all her tribe—pleasant people as they now declared themselves—was absurd, and he told her so; whereupon she accused him of lethargy, charged and harried him in attempts to rouse. Their lightest argument had a taste of quarrel. He felt drawn to her in fun, without attachment, less sure that he liked her than he was certain he disliked her brothers.

He was much astonished one afternoon, when her brothers invited him out for a row on the lake, to be taken into their confidence regarding her. He wished they would keep silence, content to glide over the pearly sea, stilled by great mountain shadows, and watch the glooms pursuing sun-rays, smile and frown, on distant heights; but finding they were talking of their sister much as though she had been a lamb for sale, he gave ear in amusement.

'Afraid she stands a poor chance,' sighed Eustace, grimly rueful. 'Most fellows of our sort have nowadays to look out for money. And we couldn't stick just anyone.'

'The world's all wrong'—Jack laughed to deprecate his own profundity—'it's getting to be just a factory for old maids.'

They rested on their oars in mid-lake; Jack mopped his forehead, Eustace filled his pipe; but for all their careful unconcern Theo felt that he was closely watched. A readiness on the part of Jack to prompt and supplement his chief's remarks savoured of prearrangement.

'We've got a biggish place, but every stick's entailed,' Eustace resumed as soon as his pipe was going; 'and far from saving a penny, I know my father's out of pocket every year. A man meeting Olive out here might suppose she'd have money. We want to guard against mistakes of that sort.'

'Some fellows, we know, can't afford to marry all for love,' supplied Jack more cheerfully.

Moore, amused by the exhibition of such cumbrous subtlety, to no end that he could discern, inquired:

'Need she marry at all if she doesn't want to?'

The question seemed to strike Eustace on a mental funny-bone. Grinning despite himself, he shot a penetrative glance at its propounder, and said: 'Of course not!' with a sarcasm the point of which escaped his hearer.

'Though we should like her to, of course, with some one decent,' threw in Jack from his place in the bows. 'It isn't altogether a question of money —eh, Eustace?'

'The man's the point.'

Their demeanour was that of men who have thrown down their cards, and its friendliness obscured the issues for Theo. He received the impression of some magnanimity, some honour done to him, though what exactly passed imagination; unless it could be that they wished their sister to be married speedily, and placed hopes on him, in which case it was Quixotic thus to show their hand. His predicament, on the conjecture, was that of a man pushed suddenly in a direction he has faced hesitating. He resented the compulsion hotly, nothing more.

'Money's a curse,' he sighed; and, not to lag behind them in frankness, he described his private circumstances, which were narrow enough—bare cabin-room for one.

The brethren then came down from their heights, appearing satisfied.

'I should think myself lucky to have as much as you've got of my own,' said Jack good-humouredly. 'I'd marry fast enough, or try to. But my only prospect's a farm as this man's tenant—no bait for a well-bred girl.'

'Chuck that, Jack!' growled Eustace, teeth on edge. 'You know that's going to be all right.'

When they entered the hall of the hotel Lady Pettigrew was in the manager's office, Condescension consulting a time-table. There seemed a question in the rise of her eyebrows as she graciously came out to greet them. It excluded Theo, and was momentary. She turned to him:

'Do stop one moment, Mr. Moore. I have

heard from a very old friend of mine, Mrs. Ettrick Jones, about you, among other things. I suppose she'd heard you were here.' ('How on earth!' gasped Theo, but she pursued, unheeding.) 'Quite an interesting person! Really, some day you must write your life. She sent her love to you.' Jack and Eustace being by that time out of earshot, her tones sank to the confidential. 'So glad you've made friends with those Cumnors. It's in your interest, believe me!'

Her eyes dropped a benison upon him as she sailed away. It behoved him to tread cautiously, compassed as he was with darkness full of snares, in which his solitary light was the suspicion, growing stronger, of a plot to wile him into bondage.

Joining the Cumnor party as usual after dinner, he was relieved, but at the same time piqued, to find Olive ice to him. There roamed in the hotel a dog belonging to the Swiss-German landlord, so used to petting that it fawned on every one. Eustace, leaning down to pat this dog, she rang out nervously:

'Don't touch that brute! If it were mine, I'd kill it! I wouldn't keep a dog that ran to everybody.'

'Kill it! Rubbish! Why, you'd cry like one o'clock!'

'Perhaps—afterwards!'

They were sitting in the warmed veranda. She forthwith left her chair and went and stood by the glass wall, gazing out on moonlight which seemed blue by contrast with the lamp-glow,

amorous of her hair. For Theo, she was poised upon a brink.

Her brothers bore him off to the Kursaal. They were in high spirits and inclined to wantonness. He escaped, and returned to the hotel, where, feeling lonely, he wrote to his cousin Gertrude.

Next morning, going out for his accustomed early walk, he was surprised to encounter Miss Cumnor. It poured with rain, and she was dressed accordingly in a shooting-cap, a mackintosh and strong boots. The business-like apparel threw new light on her personality. Wisps of her hair, rich chestnut in the daylight, were blown from time to time across her face and pushed back savagely. The expression of her great dark eyes was warlike.

'Were you waiting for me?' he asked, as she fell in beside him.

'Tell me all that passed between you and my stepbrothers yesterday. I have a right to know. They're changed, and so are you. There's some plot.'

'If there is, I'm not a party to it.'

'You won't tell me?'

'Even if I could remember . . .'

'I repeat, you won't tell me! You shall, you must, or I'll never speak to you again! There is some plot, I know. The Pettigrew is in it. You shall tell me!'

'I shall not!'

He shrank as if expecting her to strike him, whereat she sneered her contempt.

They walked along the shore road, out past Territet. Great cliffs, fledged with brushwood, appeared above them, dripping wet and shiny amid the mist. Theo stole glances at his companion's face, which was bright with her anger and the sharp exercise, dauntless to the pelt of the rain. It seemed he saw her for the first time.

She it was who broke the long silence.

'Do you wish to be friends?'

'Of course,' said Theo guardedly.

'That means you don't really.'

'But I do, really. Please go on.'

'Well, if you did really, I should say, never discuss me with other people. I hate them, and my friend must hate them too. I don't say thank you for a friend who's everybody's.'

'Well?'

'A friend would not have talked me over with Eustace. A friend would never have gone out for a whole day with the Oldfields without telling me. . . .'

'Oh, I see! You want a little dog.' Fearing she was going to cry, he quickly added: 'I'm afraid it isn't in me to be a friend on those terms. I'm too selfish.'

On his motion they had turned homeward. Her next remark was:

'I suppose you've got hosts of friends.'

'About a dozen, I should say, all told. You've seen a specimen—the man who made the row that first evening.'

'But friends like me—girl friends!'

'One—my cousin. And she's now married—to a man I've never seen.'

'Tell me all about her.'

'I'd rather not, thank you; since I've declined your terms, and am not your friend any longer.'

'I hate you!' came the fierce reply; and a minute later, catching sight of the hotel, she ran indoors speechless.

After breakfast, going to hunt up Paul Tessier, Theo was hailed from a café by the object of his search. Paul scoffed at his friend's notion of a conspiracy on the part of the Cumnors to force him into matrimony, humbly submitting that the plot described was more likely to deter a suitor than to egg him on. The girl was the danger.

'They take thee simply for an adventurer, and, having proclaimed her without fortune, think that all is said. But she wields her lassoo, and in a day or two will have thee down. To what good all my warnings? Thou comest neighing up from the wilderness, fresh to every lure of the redoubtable, adorned female, to the place where she is most mischievous, being idle, yet wouldst preserve thy tranquillity. Fly at once to Madame Gertrude for protection, or thy fate is sealed. Ah! that grand gold beard might have saved thee—like a mask. Some disguise is needed for such priceless innocence. Does one carry jewels in the open hand?'

Theo went forth from his oracle with a new outlook, swung right round upon the pivot of his opposition to the Cumnors. He would not be pushed by them, in whatever direction. Remem-

brance of Olive's angry face that morning in the rain warmed his heart for the new contest. He foresaw no difficulty in obtaining her consent to join him in a sham flirtation, got up expressly to alarm her brothers.

In this, however, he was disappointed. All that day she avoided him, he could get no word with her; but next morning she again waylaid him with her former high demands, and they renewed their difference. She seemed resolved to force her terms on him, while he declined them steadfastly, for even at a holiday game he was honest, and again for the rest of the day she ignored him. Four days they continued on this footing, strangers except for a quarrel before breakfast. On the fifth morning he asked, for the hundredth time, why she persisted in coming out with him only to fight.

'You've called me your enemy!' he said reproachfully.

She laughed.

'Some enemies are nearly friends. At any rate, my rule applies to them: I hate other people. We couldn't quarrel comfortably in public or even before a third person. You admit that? A concession! Well, I'll make it up.'

'I still don't hate other people!'

'Oh, that will come!'

Theo took the hand held out to him. He dared not open his lips again, lest they should utter words to scare her. His pulse, too, was playing queer tricks, and his brain now flashed, now clouded.

The sun shone warm on Montreux vineyards, but the bloom of earliest dawn still clung to the mountains, which formed to south and eastward a huge shadowy rampart, traversed here and there by shafts of light. Between, at the head of the lake, the old tower at Villeneuve stood up small and sharp upon a dwarfed, flat landscape dim with dust of gold. Thin mists like gossamer curled on the lake itself. They stood together on the terrace of the old parish church, whence, three weeks ago, Moore had seen all Europe as a madhouse.

'Don't you hate other people?' she inquired mischievously; and Theo truly did for the moment.

Going back towards the hotel, they met her brother Eustace, who turned on his heel and walked with them without a word. Olive's little air of bravado at that juncture—the attempt to control a situation in which her rôle was secondary—jarred on Theo. Once indoors, however, she had the sense to run upstairs, while Moore followed Eustace, at the latter's request, to the writing-room, nearly sure to be empty at that hour.

## CHAPTER V

### ONE HOUR'S WORK

'Well, what have you got to say for yourself?'

'I am here by your invitation. Please explain.'

Like all the best rooms in the hotel, that set apart for writing looked to the head of the lake, was, in fact, little more than a furnished box in the theatre bearing light on that famous scene. On entering, Eustace had turned and faced Theo, thus getting chance advantage of his antagonist, who was left with the light in his eyes as well as a wide prospect to distract his thoughts. In face of the morning beam on lake and mountain, Cumnor's wrath—the wrath of a blot upon eternal glory—seemed fun to Theo; while seen alone, and dignified by a near background, Moore's deprecating and somewhat dreamy smile stung Eustace as the last impertinence. His resentment leapt forth naked.

'You cad! . . . Sneaking after a girl you'd as good as promised to let alone! You deny it? Liar as well! We told you she was no catch, and you said you didn't think of marrying. Don't interrupt, sir! I had the tip from one of the hotel servants, who'd seen her slip out morning after morning, and did right to tell me.

Pretty to hear about one's sister! Jack and I dealt openly with you; we were friendly; and you act the cur like this! What defence have you? I'm here to listen.'

'I have nothing to say to you.'

'Good; then clear out at once, or it'll be the worse for you!'

Theo measured his adversary. Cumnor was a shade the taller, much the heavier, but calculably the less agile of the two. Moreover, he had lost his temper, and was raving. The smile, which peeped out at certain of his more terrific threats, completely maddened him.

'You turn out this very morning.'

'I do nothing at your bidding.'

Past mere words, Eustace squared up to Theo, who, on his side, was not backward. It wanted but the first blow, when another voice sang out:

'Steady on, Eustace! The early birds have about done breakfast. They'll be in here directly.'

Jack Cumnor had entered behind Theo. His advent took the strain off Eustace, but at the same time irritated him. He growled:

'All very fine for you to talk; you should have got up when I did. This fellow refuses to clear out—the one course open to a gentleman in the circumstances.'

'Miss Cumnor has, I trust, no cause to complain of my behaviour; and, that being so, I fail to see her brother's right to hector me.'

'You hear him, Jack!'

Jack went to a window and stared out over the lighted lake. With hands in his breeches-pockets,

he hummed a stave to temporize and calm them. His broad, tweed-clad back looked pacific. Eustace eyed it with impatience, wondering what he would be at. At length Jack turned, with an urbane smile embracing both the disputants, when Eustace became a pillar of scorn.

'Pshaw! Maurice!'

He hissed the wretched actor. When Jack took the lead, he was never himself. Generally he was Eustace. But now he was aping Maurice, their younger brother, who was in the family as a changeling might be, but not of it. This smile, this tone, these gestures were Maurice in a concave mirror. But Jack, though he winced at the sarcasm, did not unmask.

'I've been talking to Olive,' he said. 'It's beastly to have to admit as much of one's own sister, but there's no doubt she's fairly flung herself at this chap's head. She found out his habit of strolling out before breakfast, and foisted herself on him, though he did his best to choke her off.'

'On the contrary, I was glad of her company. You must not take her generous self-accusation literally.'

Eustace grimaced at the bookish phrase, clear proof of humbug. Jack shrugged it off, still in the Maurice manner. When Jack went on to make apology for Olive's conduct, Eustace burst the bonds of his amazement, and swore blindly, horribly, in a world turned upside down. Jack, with a smile to bid him wait, continued:

'Now, you see, we're in a fix. If, as my brother

says, you can't see your way to help us by a change of hotel—well, we must make the move, that's all. It's near the end of our time here anyhow.'

Theo saw the trap just in time. It was more than his previous estimate of their resources had prepared him to expect from the blunderbuss brethren. He laughed.

'You are most insulting. There is nothing whatever to make this fuss about. As if I could be annoyed, who am alone to blame, since blame there must be.'

He paused, while the brothers waited. The charge of immodesty aimed at her pretty wilfulness transfigured Olive in his mind. On black thunderclouds of indignation, the thought of her sat enthroned like the white lightning. It was as though a strong wind smote him suddenly from the forehead of the storm. He added:

'I have no reason to believe she cares for me,' in a voice half-strangled, wrestling with that hurricane.

'Oh, come now!' expostulated Eustace.

'If I thought she did, for one moment——'

There was no mistaking the inference. The brethren gaped on one another, limp of a sudden.

'But you said you hadn't the means——'

'I should do my best to procure them.'

Eustace turned on the baffled and chap-fallen diplomatist:

'Jack, you're an idiot! Why couldn't you leave me alone to finish the beggar? I had him fairly cornered, when you must needs cut in with a lot

of bunkum—aping Maurice, who's a clever chap: you're a fool!'

Unconcerned with their private dissensions, Moore left them there, and went to breakfast. Olive, sitting alone at a table laid for three, and demurely expectant, looked round as he entered the room. The sight of her, after what had just passed, gave burning focus to his exultation. In the way to his accustomed place, he paused behind her and murmured in the tone of greeting:

'Make me happy!'

She looked back, startled, read the meaning in his eyes, and panted:

'I'll try—Theo!'

Her deep breath ended in a smile with dropped eyelids, as if she drank of something and was satisfied.

By an effort of self-control he got to his own place, and, sitting down, drew in his chair, helped himself to a roll and butter, did those conventional things which for the moment had no meaning; while his wits led a dance of Mænads around her answer and the message in her eyes confirming it. It was perfect, a thrill complete. The closest hug must yield to it in sweetness; the lightest touch of hands would have deflowered it. Her brothers joined her at the next table and kept silence, eating and drinking savagely with eyes downcast. It was something he had gained and could never lose. The sunshine out on the lake shouted for joy; he pictured it a whirl of airy shapes, exultant little loves mobbing the lucky hour.

He rose, having eaten nothing. In the hall there was a letter for him, the porter said, and fetched it. He cut the envelope where he stood, and read:

'My dearest Theo,

'I got your letter only last night on my return from a two days' visit to our aunt at Brighton. Most inscrutable of mortals! Why from Montreux?—the place we always agreed in execrating. I think you very selfish. You should hear aunt asking me why you fail to come, and crying over the delay. Can I tell her that you prefer a little gaiety among absolute strangers to rejoicing the eyes of a poor dull old woman who loves you? Do you feel that? I hope you do, right to the heart, and will come at once.

'Yours,

'Gertrude.'

It was the douche of cold water to the drunken reveller. Moore gasped, shook himself, and across abysmal confusion beheld facts frowning at him with alarming hostility. He caught a glimpse once more of Europe as sheer Bedlam. He longed to be alone somewhere, heavily alone, and an hour later was walking hard to tire himself, having won by train to a homelier region of the Canton Vaud, clear of the skirts of the high mountains, away from the lovely hackneyed scene of his distemper, which from endless reproduction in keepsakes had acquired a smirk.

## CHAPTER VI

### THEODORE STANDS ALONE

It was dusk ere he looked down on Vevey, and the sprinkle of lights beyond it, round to where the lake's head slept in the lap of still glowing hills; full night when he got to the railway-station and found he must wait for a train. By the time he reached his hotel at Montreux the worthies were trickling out from dinner. He stood in the hall, avoided, till Mary Oldfield came forth, hugging her father's arm. She did not fight shy of him, nor did the Colonel. They asked where he had been all day, and he had tried to give them an idea, when some one pulled his sleeve from behind. It was Olive.

'Why did you run away?' she sighed reproachfully; and he suffered twinges of remorse which belonged of right to Fate. Fate had poised him on this kind of seesaw, at the fulcrum, where he could not budge an inch or shift his weight without dejecting one or other of two parties dear to him. His lazy nature groaned upon the rack.

'I wanted to think,' he said.

'Ah! so did I. But they wouldn't let me. I've had a cruel time. Lady Pettigrew has got hold of something against you, and is downright veno-

mous. We start for home to-morrow morning. They'd have whisked me off to-night only I meant to see you, and my maid Emily backed me like a Trojan. She stood up, weeping, against Eustace in my room; showed him the things to be packed, and the boxes, and made him believe that it couldn't anyhow be done. Such a scene! I should have laughed if I'd only known where you were. You're sure you meant what you said this morning?'

Satisfied with the witness of his troubled breathing, she retired as her brothers came on the scene. Moore stood, prepared for an attack, but none was made. He heard Eustace say: 'Best take no notice! Such infernal cheek!' They conferred a moment, then turned aside into the billiard-room.

'Monsieur takes dinner?' asked an anxious waiter.

'In a minute,' he said, and on a valorous prompting repaired to the salon, where most of the women were by then assembled. His entrance wrought a panic. Certain old ladies, whose normal state was coma, dropped their work and mouthed as at some frightful portent. He went straight to Lady Pettigrew.

'You've heard something to my disadvantage. May I know what it is?'

In the deluge of their horror at such impudence, all who heard him scrambled for a share in the light conversation which sprang up instantaneously like a pavid umbrella. Awe of their idol affronted mixed in their hearts with fear

for the profane youth who raised his hand against the car of Juggernaut.

'Oh, Mr. Moore! Do sit down. Here, by me. . . . People will talk and exaggerate. I told you I had had a letter from an old friend of yours and mine? Well, from the account there given me, I judge you singularly ill-adapted to find happiness in an alliance with the Cumnor family. One may surely give an opinion. The boys asked me for mine, and I gave it frankly. The Cumnors —I know them root and branch—are old-fashioned gentlefolks, full of what you would call prejudices, and they a sense of what is fitting. Olive's upbringing and traditions must be, I should imagine, directly opposite to your own. Moreover, I have a superstition, the fruit of long experience, that no match made like this, on a hotel acquaintance, turns out happily. So, much as I should like to congratulate you, I won't; you must excuse me; it would lack sincerity, as I can't think an engagement for the happiness of either of you. Now you must go. I see Mrs. Winter has come in, and you are keeping her chair. Don't be too angry; you will live to thank me.'

Alone afterwards in the dining-room, devouring some remains of dinner, he realized how neatly she had put him down.

There was bustle of excitement in the hotel. While he sat eating, heads popped in and out, and when, having finished, he went out into the hall, a group of young people in whispers there dispersed before him. He then, for the fun of the thing, paraded his good temper through the

public rooms, gratified, since he knew his part, with the sensation his appearance everywhere created.

Going out into the night air to get rid of the elation he had derived from this species of progress, he was waylaid discreetly in a dark corner by a figure in black dress and white cap, which he had seen occasionally gliding down the upper corridors. This was Olive's maid, the Trojan Emily, on an errand from her mistress to bespeak the favour of his home address. She was past the flower of life, and she carried her fruitlessness not bleakly, as do stronger virgins, but forlornly, and with a tearful droop. Theo took out Gertrude's letter from his pocket, and tore off the direction heading it, which he gave to her with a gratuity. She tried to elude the fee. Finding it useless, she lifted her face, took hurried stock of him, and sighed:

'Ah, I do hope and pray as you're a good young gentleman!'

Sobs strained the gristle throat of the creature, as she fled in terror of her great audacity.

Theo went to tap the judgment of the only friend at hand, Paul Tessier, whom he dragged out of the café of his choice. He wanted praise to reassure him, being conscious of heroic rashness; he had no use for an embrace and the matter-of-course shower of all felicity with which Paul met the tidings of his betrothal. He specified doubts and dangers; Paul simply shrugged his shoulders high, with the remark:

'What soul but shudders on the brink of the unknown, the infinite?'

Theo let fly an imprecation. Paul planted himself before him, and eyed him gravely, a hand on either shoulder.

'My friend, of one thing only be assured—it is that I love thee. All English that thou art, I love thee more than a brother. Now I speak to thee from the heart. In thee virtue, by over-indulgence, has usurped the place of vice—which has its place in the organism: that is demonstrable. Thy virtue is adorable—I myself adore it—but it is excessive, at thine age. Such virtue has no place in our society, sprung of a compromise, which counts on moderation in all things. Now, woman is unknown to thee.' Here Theo protested hotly, but Paul went on relentless, weighing hard on his shoulders. 'Woman, I repeat it, is absolutely unknown to thee. Therefore she has terrors as well as charms. Marriage has terrors for me, I grant thee; being too much of one woman; but thee, altruist! thee, Christian! thee, prodigy of manly virtue, it should in no wise appal. They say it answers among the English. And thy betrothed is ravishing; she has youthfulness, fire, temperament, and magnificent hair. I did my best to deter thee, while there was time; now I applaud, like a good spectator. Thy doubts, I see them—mere vapours of the brain, pure virgin tremors. . . . Oh, continence! Continence! Continent of sweet illusions for warm-blooded men!'

The pun convinced Theo that his friend was far gone in liquor; and, as he was thus useless for counsel, he let him go.

## CHAPTER VII

### LADY PETTIGREW HAS HER DOUBTS

Lady Pettigrew was worried out of sleep by a knocking at her bedroom door. She heard a hubbub of girlish voices outside in the passage; but slumber, with strong arms, dragged her back from understanding what was said. With a furious command to the disturbers to go away, she sank back into the deep embrace. But soon she was again made conscious, the knocking and the clamour rising louder than before.

'Go away!' she shrieked a second time, and heard the retreat. Once more she turned over to sleep; but some of the words uttered had effected a lodgment in her ear, and teased their way into her brain slowly in the manner of barley bristles. She was oppressed by the sense of a national calamity, complicated and embittered by insurrection, for some time before her fears took certain shape. The riot at her door was unheard of, and especially wrong this morning when she had made up her mind to sleep late and partake of breakfast in bed, to recover tone after the alarms of yesterday. Not to speak of the disrespect, it was most inconsiderate of those girls. But

could it be true, what they had said: that Mr. Moore. . . .

Again came a knock at her door, and the voice of Mrs. Winter, a timid worshipper, inquiring:

'May I come in?'

'Certainly not! What's the matter?' was the ungracious answer.

'Only Mr. Moore, you know, dear, has gone with the Cumnors, in the hotel omnibus. My boy read the label on his luggage; it was London, by the route they are taking. The face of Mr. Eustace Cumnor was, I am told, most terrible. My dear, there will be bloodshed if he obtrudes himself upon the journey. Mayn't I come in?'

'No, I'm in bed! Wait till I'm visible.'

'Very well, dear.' The plaintive voice submitted, and was mute.

Lady Pettigrew sat up in bed; her mind, chaotic and throbbing, seemed about to explode. She heard the splish-splash of a steamboat passing by, and the bow-bell ringing as it neared the landing-stage, a lull, and then again the churn of paddles. Gulls were screaming. Her ear attached no credit to the familiar sounds.

At the join of green plush curtains, heavily fringed, which blinded two long windows opening on to a private balcony, sunbeams wriggled in, striking from the parquet two small flames, alive with running dimples from the lake without. By this she knew it was a fine morning. Grasping the simple fact as a staff to walk by, she got up, let in the day, donned some provisional clothing, and rang up her breakfast.

With the business of eating and drinking came full realization, the disaster in all its bearings pitilessly mapped before her. And she was forced to lend an ear to the misgiving attendant on decided action in the obscurity of human issues, which presents its bill the moment things go wrong.

She had left no room, in her calculations, for a move by the enemy, falling thus into the pit of amateur tacticians. She had counted on his remaining where he was, on his not daring to press his suit in England. But now he might dare anything. She conceded to him some charm of person, voice, and manner. He might win the suffrage of parents ever ready to give way to Olive; and then her own attitude in the affair might be censured, as it was sure to be misrepresented. Her friendship with the Cumnors seemed at stake, her footing in a famous country-house, not to speak of her reputation as a chaperon, which last was a source of income. She had a presentiment of regard for the young man whose bold move threatened her with such a hobble. Room could be found on her Olympus for a successful Titan, and Moore's impudence at least appeared Titanic.

She had spoken upon unimpeachable authority, but it occurred to her now, for reassurance, to obtain a second opinion on that authority. Fully dressed, she summoned the chambermaid, and desired that Miss Oldfield should be asked to come to her. Then, throwing a shawl round her shoulders, she passed out on to the sunlit balcony,

and sat down in a great arm-chair of wicker-work, which creaked beneath her weight. Her fingers dallied with a bulging envelope.

'Come through, dear, and bring out a chair,' she called, on hearing the room-door open.

And Mary came out beside her.

'You've heard the news, of course?'

'Yes, yes!' Lady Pettigrew deferred that subject, having just remembered another card she had to play with Olive's parents. Mary Oldfield would inherit twenty thousand pounds in the course of nature, and Jack Cumnor was a younger son. With ingratiating archness, she observed: 'You're not so bright as usual, Miss Slyboots? I've a good mind to write and tell him how you're feeling.'

'I'm feeling much as usual, thank you kindly!'

'Don't make a stranger of me, Mary; that's unkind; when you know the interest I've always taken.'

The matchmaker's claim was not disputed by Miss Oldfield, though it jarred on her. Having a heart concerned, she resented the suggestion that she must thank some one else for her acquisition of a lover.

'What do you want me to say?'

She put the question hotly, with a blush, and some nervous play of hands.

'Just the truth, pet! That you like some one.'

'Well enough!'

'Very much indeed. I want the whole truth.'

'Well, you shall have it!' Mary invoked her sense of humour to escape from the clutches of

that tender inquisition. 'I'm vain enough to feel flattered by the attentions of a man who can look in my face without wincing. My back view's charming—pretty figure, grace in motion, a tolerable head of hair, my own—arts of a wretched housewife to pass off her failure! Men feel languidly drawn to inspect, up goes an eyeglass, but when they get round to the front—Ugh! Merci, non! Jack Cumnor's eyes are a mirror that always flatters. They make me out most lovely. He stares spell-bound, breathless, and thinks his really pretty sister a fright compared with me. That's the good in very stupid men.'

'Be serious, madcap!' Lady Pettigrew playfully flipped the cheek presented to her. 'You mean you're over head and ears in love with him.'

'Nothing of the sort, I do protest! I'm not so stupid as he is, and am critical.'

'Then, what do you mean, you teasing girl? Are you going to reward him? You ought to, after the dance you've led him.'

'I may, after long probation. He is amusing with his sentiment and his great propriety. I believe him at heart disreputable, a fact he will have to confess on his knees before I annex him. And he must cultivate a will of his own independent of brother Eustace. And I've no intention of forsaking dad, now he's old and shaky. . . . I'm approaching thirty; that's for the other scale——'

'Don't! don't! it's too much for my poor wits,' moaned Lady Pettigrew. 'But it all sounds rather mercenary. Now I want you to pay attention

while I read something to you. This is a letter from a very old friend of mine, who has known Mr. Moore from babyhood. I think you will agree that it entirely warrants my denouncing him as not fit to intermarry with the Cumnors. Now, are you listening?'

At first Miss Oldfield did not attend, being far too angry from the catechizing she had undergone. The light dismissal of a subject, to her momentous, was worse than the prying questions: it was downright insult. Was it likely she would expose her real weakness for the big ninny whose eyes adored her, whom she could have led to his death by a thread; or the funny blank in life now he was gone, the surge of droll memories, each so like a sob, that she knew not whether to laugh or cry on them? She had spoken the truth; she would prove her mooncalf ere rewarding him. But she adumbrated there a quaint romance, and not a balance-sheet. She was not 'mercenary.' And here was the woman reading out her letter with complacency, her face of imperial lines reposed, assured, in the evident persuasion that she faced a partial critic.

'"The late Mr. Moore was one of the early Ritualists—my dear, nothing to those we see nowadays—and odd in other ways, besides a Radical. He had good private means, and, as he was very generous, the poor adored him. Being fond of children, and himself a bachelor (I used to think he objected to the clergy marrying, but that was my mistake, as you shall hear presently), he adopted a baby boy (the Theodore you know),

and afterwards a girl (Gertrude), the orphan child of his own brother. There was something romantic about Theo's birth, I believe. My husband knew the story; I do not.

'"The way those children were brought up was the scandal of the neighbourhood. People said they were little savages, and went half naked, like the beasts that perish; and other children were kept from associating with them. But I cannot say that I ever noticed anything wrong in their behaviour. Indeed, my husband and I were very fond of them.

'"It sounds absurd, but I don't believe those children went to school a day before they were fifteen, though that does not mean, of course, that they were taught nothing. Mr. Moore had the reputation of a very clever teacher, but I did think it ill-advised of him to make no distinction between the boy and the girl. My husband used to shock me with tales of fisticuffs, and Gertrude at fourteen climbing trees beside the high road. But it is true that they were equal in all things.

'"When first the children (mere babies) came to Barford Vicarage, Mr. Moore engaged, as something between nurse and housekeeper, the daughter of a small tradesman in our market-town, widowed and made childless at one blow by the most shocking accident, to do with waggons. At the time there was all the talk, she was quite elderly and not in the least attractive, though, I have every reason to believe, most worthy. Well, when Theo and Gertrude went away to school, every one presumed this woman would leave the

vicarage. When she stayed on, almost alone with the Vicar—I may say, dear, that the Vicar was well over sixty, and a man the most irreproachable in that way, though otherwise eccentric —then people talked. The bishop was actually appealed to, and came down privately, without telling anyone. He came here afterwards, dear, benevolent old man, and over a glass of port laughed heartily with my husband. He was satisfied of Mr. Moore's innocence. But I grieve to say the bishop's visit alarmed Mr. Moore, for within a month he was married to the woman. Every one was, of course, ten times more scandalized than before. I confess that I myself was horrified, though, when I went to see her; she was the same as ever, *simply the housekeeper*, and said she was ashamed to look me in the face, and never would have done it if he had not commanded her. . . .

'"Theo went to school in Switzerland, and then was some time in Paris, said to be studying, but I fancy he never, at any time, did more than he was obliged to in the way of work. In the end he went to London University. I did not know there was such a place, and never knew any other young man who went there, which is perhaps as well, for the views Theo there imbibed were far from edifying. When last I saw him he was a declared Socialist, and I had to quarrel with him for ventilating in this house opinions which my dear dead husband never could have tolerated, though himself an advanced thinker within safe bounds. I was very sorry

afterwards, as he went abroad, and I had a mother's love for him. There had been riots (you remember), and Theo was so far implicated that an old friend, who had interest with the then Government, got him attached to some expedition, to be out of the way. He stayed out there, wandering."

'That is all I need read. She has written a budget. Now, what do you think of it? Was I not justified?'

Miss Oldfield reflected. She had a grudge to pay off, and was glad to be able to do it promptly, at no worse cost than a piece of honesty.

'I hardly think so, though, of course, I don't know what you said. He isn't a Socialist now; and if he was badly brought up, it doesn't show. You wouldn't, of course, tell a man like Eustace Cumnor that he was possibly illegitimate. That would be libellous; the passage in your letter is much too hazy to go upon. In any case, it seems to me wrong to use this against him. It was written entirely in his favour. Isn't it rather like a breach of confidence? At least, I imagine your friend will think so, if she comes to know of it.'

'Eh, what?' gasped Lady Pettigrew, bewildered, and then snapped resolutely, 'I don't agree with you.'

Mary rose to go. Lady Pettigrew made no motion to detain her. She sat glued to her chair, gazing out across the lucent lake at great mountains, massive as her dismay. Two white-winged

barques, the one from St. Gingolph, the other from the Rhone mouth, stood for two separate apprehensions converging on her mind's eye, from the possible coolness of the Cumnors and the certain ire of Mrs. Ettrick Jones. Over all hung the dread of an action for libel.

In spite of all the girls on earth, the letter justified her. She clung to the letter as to a shrub on a face of cliff, could think of nothing else without dizziness. She might forward the letter to the parent Cumnors. No, they would show it to Eustace, who would be disappointed after her denunciations. To whom could she confide this letter, her defence from calumny ?

Why, there was Maurice ! Of course, Maurice. She ought to have thought of him first. He alone, of all that tribe, could be called dispassionate. By his sensible marriage with a rich widow much his senior, by his keen appreciation of the humours of his family, she knew him sagacious. She had always quarrelled with Maurice ; excepting Olive, who was a chit, she had never quarrelled with another Cumnor. Besides, he was a rising barrister, able to shield her from the fear of libel actions. She lost no time in sending her old friend's effusion, with the necessary comments, to Maurice in London, imploring him to be an angel.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A HARASSED RETREAT

Meanwhile, Eustace Cumnor, and, in a lesser degree, Jack also, was qualifying for the rank of hero, enduring close confinement, privation, and, worst of all, the taunts of a much-loved sister, with the gravity of wrought iron. They had been seated in the omnibus, wondering why it still waited, when Moore appeared in travelling garb, tipping the green-aproned porters, who, lacking discrimination, bowed to that cad as obsequiously as to the Cumnor party. Eustace set fast his teeth and gripped his brother's arm as in a vice. Then, in the clumsy vehicle, crawling up to Montreux Station, with Olive talking barefaced to the man, it had seemed he led a rout, to the world's derision. In the Swiss train the foe sat divided from them only by a half-partition, over which Olive spoke to him occasionally. That she was the aggressor made it more humiliating, since they asked to quarrel with the man's behaviour. Sobs from the faithful Emily thickened the atmosphere of disaster.

Boarding a French train at Lausanne, Olive had the bad taste to call from the door of their compartment:

'There's room here, Theo!'

But Eustace, down on the *trottoir*, looked straight into Moore's eyes, and hurled through clenched teeth:

'You dare!'

After that he felt better, though not so well as if he could have struck a blow.

'I go smoking,' Moore had said, lifting his hat with a smile to Olive.

The corridor carriage had not then made its appearance on French railroads, and the first-class compartment of those days, for stuffiness, the smell of leather, and the climb up into it, resembled the inside of a diligence. To smoke at once on entering the hole was man's mere instinct; but Jack and Eustace were condemned to gnash their teeth on emptiness by the stern resolve to sit guard over Olive. The train was crowded, their compartment filled with women, obliging them to sit close and refrain from blasphemy; and this while they beheld in imagination their offender spread out comfortably among men, with a pipe in his mouth.

'You can't wonder at our disgust with the man now,' Eustace flung across to Olive, seated opposite. 'This shows the beast he is!'

She took no notice.

His mouth watered for a taste of tobacco. It was getting altogether too damnable, the imprisonment, the enforced restraint of language—above all, Olive's attitude. Couldn't she see that he disliked the job as much as she did?

After hours of it, the train stopped at a wayside

station in the Swiss Jura, when Jack leapt up with the breath of an objurgation, hissing:

'I must smoke!'

Or die, or go stark mad, could be inferred from his demeanour. He sprang out into keen air, catching sight across a chasm of pine-trees running ant-like up some green slopes pied with snow towards a sword-bright edge of sky. A charge of officials yelling 'En voiture!' with an expeditive 'Sapristi!' drove him back on the instant. He fell, gaping, into his seat beside Eustace, having described the course in air of a boomerang. An irate official voice declaimed at him as the train moved on. The stop just there had been *facultative*, a lady was good enough to explain.

'You should have taken my advice and gone "smoking,"' laughed Olive.

Jack retained the smart impression of pine-trees, or ants, streaming up to the sky, fixed on his eyeballs as by a flash of lightning, giving him a dazed, blind look. He made no comment on his sister's cruel levity, while Eustace thanked her with sarcasm. The halt for examination of luggage at the frontier soon after afforded them some relief, tantalizing to remember when they again suffered martyrdom through long hours.

At Dijon, where they had ten minutes, both jumped out and lit their pipes, kept filled in readiness, and Eustace talked to Emily, the maid, in the second-class.

'Where is he now, Mr. Eustace?' was her

frightened question, while, head out of window, she looked this way and that, as in dread he might overhear.

'If I could get him alone for two minutes, I'd make him sorry he was ever born!' murmured Eustace, with a diabolical expression.

'Oh, Mr. Eustace, sir, I pray, do nothing rash! For the love o' mercy, sir—and Mr. Jack, too! She's that set on him, sir, 'twould melt the heart of stone—true love, or I never saw it. She'd die of grief! And think of your honoured parents, sir—the talk for the fam'ly! 'Tis true he ain't her equal, nor ever will be; but think, sir, she does love him!'

'Emily, I'll have his blood and drink it!' snarled Eustace, with a sudden show of teeth.

She could not repress a scream.

'Oh, don't! Oh, don't, Mr. Eustace! Oh, spare him, sir! . . . But there, you're only at your jokes to fright me. How that does carry me back to old days, to be sure! You was always hiding behind doors, and Mr. Jack, too. . . . Oh, don't, sir! As you hope for mercy, don't!'

Eustace had caught sight of Moore standing talking at the door of Olive's compartment, and of Jack looking anxiously for his chief. He knocked out his pipe deliberately and strode back, heedless of Emily's prayers. A shoulder-charge, of the kind permitted in Association football, sent Moore flying (he was unprepared), while Eustace, saying 'Sorry!' regained his seat in the train. A cry from Olive, shouts on the

platform—— The man had fallen; Jack had picked him up.

'En voiture, messieurs, s'il vous plaît!' the chant was raised, and Jack scrambled to his place, whispering half to Olive:

'It's all right; I dusted him.' Once in his seat, he subjoined for his brother's ear: 'Wasn't that going a bit far?' getting in response a growl:

'I can't palaver!'

Eustace found grim satisfaction in remembrance of the episode, smiling fitfully beneath the hand on his moustache. Olive, really frightened at such violence, looked fit to cry, and Jack, the soft of heart, spoke comfort to her. But Eustace maintained severity. Indirectly, however, he offered terms, saying:

'If you keep inviting him to hang round, I won't answer for myself—I may kill him!'

Recollection of the effect which a similar threat had taken upon poor Emily, suggested the form of this overture; but substantially he meant what he said, and it appeared so. The attentions of that nondescript so enraged his pride in her that, were the least familiarity encouraged in his presence, he would lose self-control, and might do anything.

'I won't tease any more,' she said at length, in a voice so contrite that, though her warder growled out 'Good!' his heart sank heavily. Was the man so much to her?

Eustace had quick perceptions where he cared; it was only where he loathed or felt indifference

he could see nothing save the face presented; but the circle of his love was very narrow, which may account for its tragic intensity. There was not a woman in it except his invalid stepmother and her child, his sister. To see him at home, placing cushions for the invalid, treading and speaking softly where she lay, recalled the transformation of a fairy tale, the beast turned courteous prince, the rough hide shed. He suffered now with Olive, divining her feelings pretty accurately, though not a trace of this appeared in his visage.

By and by she faltered: 'It's not only me. He has been called home by his people.'

This was still more alarming, for Olive, at bay, was not wont to explain or apologize. He answered gravely, on her ground now, though still opposing:

'Didn't know he had anyone belonging to him. That makes it worse, don't you see? Must be pretty heartless to keep them waiting while he fooled about. What a shame—after four years. He's been out there four years, he told me.'

'Oh, they aren't very near relations—an aunt and cousin!'

Eustace twigged at once that she was jealous of them. Jealousy was to be looked for in her; nor did it, taken separately, argue any depth of sentiment. The little familiar trait was welcome as at least one thing steadfast in a sea of change. He did not repent of his violence to the man Moore, since it resulted in a truce to arts that

sickened him. He was taking her home to wiser heads, better qualified to judge.

They reached Paris late at night, and, renouncing a plan to stop there which might be known to the enemy, took cab to the Gare du Nord. Olivia, now a party to their arrangements, fell in with them readily, only anxious to avert their wrath from Theo. It was annoying to discover that their bugbear had taken the same resolution, to see him on the platform awaiting the after-midnight boat-train. But Olive gave no signal, and he held aloof. He was in the train somewhere, of course, and they saw him planted forward on the packet, staring out for Dover cliffs amid the morning mist, but the strife was over. At disembarking he was borne near to Eustace in the crowd which pressed to the gangway, and called out, laughing:

'I forbear to charge you!'

But Eustace turned his shoulder on him, simply nauseated. The bounder seemed to regard the whole revolting business as a game.

Theo had, in truth, enjoyed it as a game till he caught sight of Gertrude on the platform at the London terminus. He had sent her a telegram at the moment of leaving Montreux. The high indifference which had always marked her features in repose quickened to brightest animation as she caught his signal and bore towards him through the jumbled crowd. Her eyes belittled his excitements of the past few days.

'Make haste and get your luggage. Put the

bulk of it in the cloak-room; we'll fetch it later. You'll find me hereabouts.'

He took her at her word and chased his porter.

It was while fretting in vain attempts to keep up with a minion who slipped lizard-wise through interstices of the crowd that he felt himself detained by a timid hand.

'If you please, sir, Miss Cumnor would like to speak to you a minute while the gentlemen see to our luggage. (And oh! sir, don't judge harsh of Mr. Eustace. He does the best for all, as he sees it, and I'm sure he will, and Mr. Jack too!) If you'll kindly be so good as follow me.'

A tremor of conspiracy in the Abigail's voice chimed oddly with its notes of lamentation. She scurried on before in a distraught manner, chin on shoulder, to make sure he followed. He strove not to see Gertrude right in front of him, just beyond where Olive watched over the lesser baggage. But she saw him, and had moved to meet him when arrested by his stop beside a girl unknown.

'You won't forget me?—promise faithfully!—nor forget to write? I'll write and tell you how things go—our business. You really love me?'

He would have answered 'Yes' from a full heart, would have prized above rubies the offer of her pushed-up veil, had Gertrude been out of sight. As things were, he took his first taste of her lips with a plain reluctance that made Olive laugh.

'I thought you liked other people!'

A second proffer of the lips compelled acceptance.

'Good-bye!' he breathed fervently.

'For a little while!' she nodded, smiling through a sudden rise of tears.

Theo made all haste to retrieve his porter.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOME AT LAST

OLIVE, her maid, and the pile of luggage had been swept from the scene. Gertrude stamped impatience beside a waiting hansom.

'What an age you have been! Jump in,' she said. 'I want my breakfast. For goodness' sake don't be polite with me, Theo! Do as I tell you; get in first. I must tell the man where to drive.'

'Now, give me some of your news,' she continued, taking place beside him.

Out of the station's shade they passed into joyous morning, enveloping grimy London in hues of the primrose and the violet—a feast of spring. The traffic, not yet at full volume, made a wistful murmur, with only an occasional leap to noise upon the passage of some heavy vehicle. The chirp of the pert town sparrows was everywhere dominant. Theo kept silence, and Gertrude imitated him, merely laying her hand on his. It was a word from their private language, and meant comprehension. It set him wondering: Had she understood?

'Won't you tell me anything?' She broke their silence.

'I met your friend Paul Tessier in Switzerland —the same good soul as ever. He has made a name——'

'Now, Theo!' She compelled him to look her in the face, using a conjuration from their childhood games. 'Honest Injun, please! Who was that girl you kissed in front of me?'

'A Miss Cumnor.'

'*A Miss Cumnor!* Whoever kissed a Miss Anything? Her Christian name, sir?'

'Olivia.'

Gertrude repeated the name deliberatively, adding:

'And so you're engaged to her, I suppose, or think you are? Well, who is she? Did you know her before you went to Montreux?—is it three weeks ago?'

'I confess I did not.'

'It is a confession. . . . And so aunt had to wait in the most dreadful anxiety the time necessary for you to succumb to the charms of some one—anyone!—three weeks, in fact. . . . I see it all now! You were in what we should once have called a "tempt me" mood, and we, who had waited long, might wait still longer. Our society lacked the spice of hazard which appealed to you in that mood, though some people might have thought that after four long years. . . . There, Theo'—she smote his hand lightly—'I've done teasing. While you kept away I felt hurt and indignant, but now I'm far too happy to be disagreeable from a sense of duty. What pretty hair your lady-love has! Shall I like her, do you

think? I'm afraid she wasn't taken with the glimpse of me?'

'What do you mean? She never saw you!'

'Oh yes, she did. She saw our first meeting, and I wondered who the girl could be who stared so vengefully. And I mean that I don't think you'd have had that public exhibition of her attachment if I had not been standing close at hand. It was to guard against misapprehensions on my part. . . . Of course, I'll do anything in the world to help. You must tell me the whole story by and by. At present, breakfast is the immediate object, and we're nearing home.' Pushing up the trap, she gave the driver some directions as to turnings, ending with 'Stop here, please! The house with white blinds!'

The drawing up of the cab gave Theo a shock of dizziness, as if he had been hurled through the air and struck earth suddenly. The drive was a whirling memory. They were in St. John's Wood, and he was scarce aware that they had passed the Marble Arch.

The house was one of a coterie of superannuated villas, which made the suburban claim to exclusiveness on the strength of a gap between Some slight disparities of decoration no more impaired their uniformity than do the divers faces in a rank of soldiers. Theo failed to imagine Gertrude's living there, but followed her up the flagged path to the door with a dazed impression that they both adventured.

She was showing him where to hang up his hat

and overcoat in the hall when a worried voice said, 'Here you are at last!' and some one holding a newspaper emerged before them.

'My husband,' murmured Gertrude.

Theo was too profoundly curious to dare look closely at the man who then shook hands with him; but he formed the idea that he was remarkably handsome. A moment later, in the breakfast-room, he thought he had never seen such deep lines in so young a face. They were a positive disfigurement, and seemed the outcome of some dire convulsion.

On Gertrude whisking out of the room to doff her hat and jacket, her husband followed with the gloves she had thrown on a chair, and the visitor could hear him in the distance loud in blame of her untidiness. Coming back, he was most cordial in his address to Theo, but with a reserve of irritation betrayed in restless pacings to and fro with frequent daggered glances at the door.

On his wife's reappearance, he dealt her a furious scowl and rang the bell.

'My dear Harry, I besought you not to wait,' she laughed at his ill-humour.

Talk at breakfast was all between the cousins, Harry confining himself to interjections depreciatory of everything of his wife's providing. This conduct, offensive in any other, was not so in him, owing to a certain artlessness of presentment, which made it appear quite natural, and merely childish. As soon as he was gone, Gertrude remarked:

'He's worse in the mornings.'

She stood in the bay of the window to wave to him as he went out.

'What does he do?' asked Theo. 'I speak enviously, for I've got to look out for a paying job myself.'

'Harry's is not paying; he's quite well off, you know. It's just an occupation we devised for him. He acts as secretary to an uncle of his, a philanthropist, who has no end of correspondents. Harry has a mania for indexing and arranging given material. His standing grievance is that he can't introduce any precise method into my thoughts and works. When first I met him he was killing himself with drink and horrid drugs, but you can't think how much nicer he used to be. He clutched me like a drowning man, and I saved him—at any rate, so he says. Has it ever struck you what numberless men in the world depend for their good temper on bad habits? It's been a queer story, Theo, first and last. You'll hear it all soon enough; Harry himself is sure to tell you.

'Now I have several little things to see to, and in half an hour must be off to meet our respected aunt, to whom, in pursuance of a secret compact, I telegraphed this morning early. You'll find her changed, I'm afraid; I don't half like the way she tires herself. No, you're not to come with me. I must prepare her mind to receive you as a gay Lothario, who kisses girls at railway-stations. Why, you never kissed even me more than twice in your life. It wasn't in our principles, was it?—or if it was, we never bothered to unearth it.

Now before I go, let me possess the facts. You hint at difficulties. What are they exactly?'

Theo gave a few details listlessly, wishing she would let him rest, just when he had attained forgetfulness, which meant enjoyment of the present atmosphere. He suspected her of intent to punish him by harping on the shameful business; and, in truth, her eyes kept quizzing him.

'I'm sorry they're that kind of people,' was her comment upon what he told her. She looked haughty to the very thought of them. 'What can Mrs. Ettrick Jones have written about you so very dreadful? She's the soul of kindness. I'll write this minute and reproach her prettily.'

She led him to a room upstairs she called her wilderness—a litter of personal rubbish, the pictures on its walls, the books, the ornaments, things of no beauty or intrinsic value, preserved simply for old associations. It was Harry's despair, she told him, while pointing out objects he would remember. The window looked into the branches of an ancient mulberry-tree, she showed him with pride; when the tree got leaves it quite shut out the town. At present it was only budding.

'I'm a dreadful chatterbox this morning. I know exactly what a canary feels when the cloth is taken off its cage—the intoxication of real sunshine. You can't think what a mopy, silent person I have been. Now make yourself at home. Here are plenty of books, and a sofa if you want to rest.'

Theo, accepting her suggestion, chose a book

at random, and stretched his length upon the couch. Gertrude sat down at her writing-table. After a little while the book fell on the floor with a bang, alarming till he perceived the cause of it and saw Gertrude's face turn, smiling, when in relief his head fell back and his limbs relaxed.

He awoke to find his aunt leaning over him, with fond eyes perusing his face.

'There, he's awake!' she cried in self-reproach. 'Go to sleep again, you scamp! I've heard of all your misdoings. Ah, well may you blush!'

Her tones expressed high glee as she rallied him on his sudden start to love, demanding a minute description of the lady, a task he was far too sleepy to undertake. Then she went off, having a mission to overhaul his wardrobe, and but three hours to spend in London.

Gertrude laughed.

'Aunt's enthusiasm for holy matrimony is a mere blind. In reality she's a most unholy materialist. She sees children in perspective, that's all. You should see her down at that orphanage, as Sister Ada, mothering some poor wizened little elf, always the last comer, with just the same love she gave to us as children. I've been a cruel disappointment to her. I try in vain to picture her face when Harry and I separate.'

'You'll never do that!'

'Oh yes, we shall. That's settled. We squabble now over details. It won't be an out-and-out separation, we like each other too well for that. I shall still watch over him, and he will see me

as often as he likes. But to live in the same house is growing purgatory for both of us.'

'But why?'

Theo's tone was querulous. He was basking in the pleasant atmosphere of her home, feeling content to live there for ever, and she talked of change, of dissolution.

She replied a little dryly:

'It isn't so easy as it once was for me to tell you everything, Theo.'

## CHAPTER X

### AN INTERIOR

The boon of somebody to tease and laugh at, somebody who understood and could retort in kind, relieved Gertrude of that weight of deadly earnest, the burden of her husband's sick intelligence, which had held her down, compressed, as in a grave. If only she could keep Theo now that she had got him, she felt of might to persevere in all her duties.

Her husband kindly insisted on her taking Theo out to the theatre, and to concerts, though he himself would rather have sat on hot nails than accompany them. She took thought for her dress on those occasions; and it pleased her to feel that Theo at her side was subjugated, that he found her attractive, often catching herself in rivalry with his Olivia. But truly she thought nothing serious of his betrothal, while feigning deep concern for his reproof.

That he had some admiration for the girl was clear; but that he was heartily ashamed of it now, in his cousin's presence, seemed no less evident. He put on the face of toothache when she touched the subject, grudged her the smallest detail; till

she could have prayed for a ten minutes' audience of Paul Tessier, just to know what to think.

A note 'in haste' from Mrs. Ettrick Jones, proclaiming horror at the deed imputed to her, and announcing that she had written to Lady Pettigrew for an explanation, failed to excite him. He merely chuckled at the hen-fight of two righteous dowagers. His demeanour was a perfect riddle. Was he in love at all? She could not tell. But she would be sorry were the Cumnors, after all their rudeness, to win the day from him too easily.

At a sign that his love for Olive was to prove the incentive he had always needed, her satisfaction could have embraced the two of them; but none appeared to her. Ready to abet his marrying, if once she could be sure he truly wished it, her first desire was to see him earnest at some kind of work.

With all who watched his childhood, she had believed him destined to make a name in the world; yet here he was, at eight-and-twenty, still waiting to decide on a career. If work could be procured in London, so much the better, it would fix him near her; but work anywhere, of any kind, however distasteful, would be better for him than this aimless loafing, this drowsy Oriental self-surrender. She harped to him delicately on that chord, aiming to stir his ambition, and did succeed in disturbing the man within him.

He confessed that he was tired of starless drifting, and, even previous to his betrothal, had

determined to accept the first offer of employment. Only—and here his smile reproached her doubt of him—it was none so easy to meet with even the worst of offers in these days of glutted markets. Could she teach him how to set about it, where to look? She admitted that she could not; but mentioned his old friend, James Warne, as one in the swim of things who might direct him. He clutched the suggestion, and went that very afternoon to see James Warne.

Gertrude awaited his return contentedly, smiling at her mental pictures of the interview. She could recall, as of yesterday, her first introduction to Mr. Warne at a West End restaurant, whither he had been brought to lunch by Theo. 'This is Mr. Warne, my right-hand man just now!' Theo had said that, with his hand on the shoulder of the grave, shy man, his senior, who had looked absurdly gratified. And then, as they sat at meat, he had told her in confidence of that wonderful society he and Warne had founded. She could feel now the laughter struggling like a bird in her bosom at sight of Theo's big round eyes of mystery—the same eyes he had made, as a little boy, when he brought a butterfly in his cap to show her. For countenance she had fixed her gaze on Mr. Warne, who was drinking it all in eagerly, hanging on his prophet's lips. Time had turned the tables with a vengeance; now Theo went to James for inspiration. But Warne had worked in the interim, winning hard experience. By sheer force of industry he had risen to be the editor of a well-established weekly paper.

He still clung to his opinions learnt at Theo's feet, still quoted Theo upon questions which the latter had long since shelved as immaterial. If only she, or Warne, or his new-found Olive—anyone, could rekindle in his eyes the old enthusiasm and focus it upon some attainable object! . . .

When Theo came back at dusk he looked so miserable that Harry, who was in the room with her, inquired anxiously of his health. It was nothing, he explained with a curt laugh, only Jim had talked like one of Dante's infernals, the kind of stuff to make a man give up at once and go and hang himself. He had just weathered a sandstorm; had been pelted with no end of those small disheartening facts which sting in the face like sand and blind you. Harry was all compassion; but Gertrude steeled her heart against his pathetic wry face over a pill which she knew, however bitter, to be good for him.

It was not long before she had Warne's version of the interview. It was prefaced by shrugs of despair.

'He's too healthy, much too comfortable in himself. It's all that confounded private income. He's downright plethoric with self-enjoyment, and would be the better for a little spiritual blood-letting, if one knew how to effect it scientifically. He's in earnest, too, in a way; and ought to be worth some one's money, with all those languages at his fingers' end, and that fine intellect lying fallow. But he's looking for an arm-chair, and the mischief is there's none going. I told him,

he has missed his turn and must simply trudge round till he finds an opening. It was for that he called me a Dantesque Infernal.

'He brought me some stuff he'd written out there in the East. I didn't say so at the time, but it's utterly hopeless. He's always too close to the subject, all mixed up with it, in fact; and he has a trick of giving his personal support to time-honoured catchwords and turns of phrase, which are threadbare cant to the public—like the people who write hymns. There's no eye to the outward effect. It's the fault of his whole posture in life. He's part of the show unconsciously (that's another point), and can't get out of it to have a look. In fact, his critical faculty is almost entirely undeveloped. I hope I speak intelligibly.

'Of course I shall keep my eyes open on his account—you know my love for the man, and that you can trust me; and if I hear of anything, I'll let him know. I'm afraid that is all I can do.'

Gertrude did not thank Mr. Warne. That somewhat embittered, overworked individual was too closely her friend to require thanks. Indeed, to have preferred them in this case would have been a solecism, when she knew his zeal for Theo to be as great and independent as her own. Her return was to keep him informed of each step of their hero's progress in the search for work, in which, though continuing of his own accord, he cut but a languid figure, most unheroical. From looking up old friends, or answering some trap advertisement, he came home dispirited, with the

same tale always. The look of disillusion was becoming habitual, she fancied, watching over him. It was unlike Theo to brood on first reverses. She feared he was already weary of this tame home-life, fretting to rove again.

At length she asked point-blank to be told what was troubling him. It was on a day when she had taken him to gladden her aunt at Brighton, and his glum face as they returned by train provoked the question. He told her that he had received no line from Olive in the three weeks which had now elapsed since their parting, though he had written to her more than once, it appeared.

'Then you are really, honestly, in love?' she said.

'I suppose so. . . . If I could get something to do, that would make up my income to, say, six hundred a year—what they'd call just enough—I could make the formal demand and settle it once for all; it's the suspense that worries me.'

He seemed unwilling to pursue the subject, and she let it drop, having gleaned food enough for amusement from the peep allowed into his state of mind.

On the next day, and partly as a result of that brief confidence which told her he desired conclusions, she made him call on Mr. Gravesey, who, more than anyone else she could think of, was likely to have interest in the quarters where work is offered. Theo had up till now shirked this visit, his plain duty, playing the coward not without reason, for his latest memory of the irascible old man was of the kind to set his ears still

tingling. He begged her to go with him, but she too well knew the character to be dealt with.

'He'd say you skulked behind my petticoats. Don't be so silly, Theo. You're no longer a child.'

He came home sooner than she expected, and in high feather; not that he had prospered at all —quite the contrary; but the ogre had made such a mouth of devouring rage, had fended him off with such comic execrations, that he had been chuckling, more or less, ever since. Gertrude, at her household accounts when he entered, pushed back her chair to listen to him. The tale he told, though funny, did not account to her mind for his great elation. She caught the hint of something shy in hiding behind this rattle, and was not greatly surprised when, on a pause, he said:

'By the way—Gertrude!' and stopped there awkwardly.

'Theo!' She turned right round to face him.

'Well, I've been thinking, it may be years before I find the berth I'm looking for. Indeed, it looks as if there's no room for me. I think I must write to Olive and explain how it is. It isn't fair to keep her bound.'

'No, Theo'—Gertrude pursed up her lips and shook her head decidedly. 'You mustn't. You can't in honour break it off—when she's probably fighting your battles?'

'Who talked of breaking it off?' He coloured hotly. 'But I ought in honour to put the case before her clearly, in the worst light. . . .' He paused, meeting her eyes, to ask, 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing. I was only trying to fathom your motives, to find out how far they are unselfish. . . . Well, you want to write, don't you? I'm afraid I need all this table. Ask Harry in the study; he'll set you up.'

In passing him on to her husband, she had a purpose further to deflate his egoism. Harry, all unknowingly, dealt in pin-pricks, and by the pin alone, she knew, is bombast vulnerable; it bounces to the stroke of sword or battle-axe. How often had her own melodramatic moods gone off in spiritless laughter at a touch of Harry! She had condemned Theo to assist at a ceremony, which he could not well curtail, since it was performed in his honour: the comparison of various nibs, the choice of notepaper, the setting-forth of endless paraphernalia in a predestined order; and even after, thinking it well ended, he had sat down to write, the present of a penwiper, the offer of another chair! Whatever of his impulse survived that slow fire of irritation would be genuine, and not ridiculous, she thought.

Hearing a door slammed viciously, she feared he had lost his temper; but it was her husband who came to complain. Theo had lighted his pipe in the study, contravening one of those unwritten laws of the Medes and Persians which it was Harry's lifework to enforce. Knowing how the smell of tobacco distressed the abstainer, Gertrude had restricted Theo's smoking to the room she called her wilderness and a single pipe after dinner in the dining-room. She thought she had given the scatterbrain hints enough.

'I said nothing,' Harry told her, 'because I knew his letter was important. But it's annoying, just when I'm in the middle of a calculation which interests me.'

She praised his forbearance, and generally did her best to soothe him.

Presently Theo burst in on them with the news that he had changed his mind about writing to Olive. He would write, instead, to her father. The only drawback was, he didn't know the old boy's Christian name. That obstacle Harry removed by referring to a bulky record of our county families. 'Cumnor—Geoffrey Eustace, Sandset, Bedfordshire; that's your man,' he announced.

'G. E. Cumnor. Thanks!'

Theo was gone like a whirlwind, much to the annoyance of Captain Elphinstone, who had the disgust of seated age for sudden, unconsidered movements. They were startling, and made him swear inadvertently.

Gertrude smoothed him down once more, and, when Theo dashed out to post the fateful letter, she helped him to purify his study and restore its faultless order. She was grateful to him for putting up with Theo; it had been her overshadowing fear that they might not get on together; and he had been good since her cousin came, sparing of those painful scenes which had before been of daily occurrence. She was proud of him, she said, having to speak to him as to a child; and he received the encomium with a child's delight.

But a victim of nerves, like Fortune, should not be thanked till all is done. On the following afternoon she was humbled before Theo. Harry, coming home in the worst of tempers, stamped from room to room, banging doors, calling 'Gertrude!' here, 'Gertrude!' there, demanding in furious tones to know the cause of this and that microscopic displacement, winding up the demonstration with a grand tirade against her in the drawing-room; Theo standing by, aghast. He had called her the very demon of disorder, and compared his position, trailing after her, for ignominy, to the tail of a kite, when the parlour-maid announced:

'Mr. Maurice Cumnor.'

Entered a personage of the middle height, bearing to the brothers Jack and Eustace that elusive family likeness which disappears entirely with the opportunity for comparison. Reddish hair, somewhat sobered by age, a large clean-shaven face of sarcastic lines, redeemed from coarseness by a studious pallor; a certain fitness of apparel, ridiculing the foppish.—These details, and the ease with which he faced a situation full of awkwardness for the chance comer, spoke the man of the world.

'Pray forgive our discomfiture. My husband was reciting, and we didn't expect anyone.' Gertrude, at one stroke, regained her countenance, dragged Theo out of stupefaction, and covered Harry's spluttering retreat. The visitor put up an eyeglass and, with a facial contortion to fix it, visibly admired the speaker

'It is my fault for interrupting. Please forgive me. I come here in pursuit of one Theodore Moore.'

My cousin here. I'll leave you.'

'Please don't, unless you're keen on the recitation. There's nothing secret about my errand. I'm here to apologize to Mr. Moore for the way my brothers behaved to him in Switzerland—it was, I'm sure, unpardonable—and to beg him to forget it. They are really the best of good fellows, and act always on the noblest motives; just as a bull may be supposed to aim at the root of evil when he charges you, horns down, with his eyes shut. You'll see that when you get to know them better.

'Here's a note from my father, Mr. Moore. It was written before he received yours this morning, but that makes no difference. He wants you to go down to Sandset for a few days—not as an accepted swain, you understand, but to make acquaintance. My wife is staying there, and I go down from Friday or Saturday to Monday. If next Friday evening suits you, we might travel together, and I could, perhaps, oil the wheels of introduction a little.'

Gertrude watched Theo's face while he read the missive. It expressed the utmost disconcertion, near dismay. He accepted Maurice Cumnor's offer with some show of gratitude, managed to do the polite, but all the while his eyes looked terrified. It embarrassed her to find herself suddenly under fire of the eyeglass, its owner smiling at her as if he knew and shared her amusement.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GOOD ANGEL

The capitulation of the enemy, though sprung on Theo thus suddenly, had in it nothing precipitate or unconsidered. It represented the labours of Maurice, and Maurice was the soul of circumspection. However much the elder Cumnors might dislike his interference, and the patronizing tone of his advice, they were wont to depend on his judgment, aware that it was not formed lightly.

Regarded in his younger days as the black sheep of the Cumnor flock—chiefly, he would have told you, for breaking its rule of dullness—Maurice had learnt in opposition and exile to spy holes in the family code, and criticize habits of thought he found as antiquated and uncomfortable as plate-armour. And now that worldly success had re-established him in the good graces of his clan, it amused him to make his relatives eat humble pie occasionally. This was not so hard a feat as at first glance it would seem, for the Squire and Eustace had no brains for finance, and often blundered into fixes, real or imagined, from which Maurice could easily extricate them. In return for their deference thus extorted, Maurice gave them a measure of his liking and devoted a

good deal of time to their affairs. But there was one of the family he could never stand ; and that was Olive.

He hated Olive—not, indeed, with the anger of Cain, but with a placid, cool malevolence that was far more lasting. Maurice, in his thirty-fourth year, had espoused a rich widow of sixty, whose fat, painted face and golden hair came as an additional shock to his people. The bride's pet name, by misfortune, was Bella. Olive pounced on that name, and rang the changes on it in the bridegroom's ear. She launched all the obvious sarcasms, exaggerating pity for the cheated crone, when all the rest had sense enough to hold their tongues. Previously he had disliked her as a spoilt child ; but after that he gave her no quarter. He made her out a perfect fool, demolished all her pretty poses, called her airs and graces sickening, and very often by his teasing plunged her in tears. He would himself have scouted the idea of hatred, even as the angler by a summer stream denies all animus against the fish he plays with. He simply opined that she would come to grief; and the opinion, radiating from him, took hold on others with a chill of dread.

On reading Lady Pettigrew's first, self-justifying letter Maurice had been highly amused. It was the first he had heard of Olive's love-affair; and it showed him his young sister, a befooled Titania, scratching the awned ears of a loud heehawing jackass ! Had he not said she would make a fool of herself? Lady Pettigrew

pronounced the man unthinkable, begging him to impress the fact upon his father's mind, and in the same breath asked him to protect her from an action for libel. From this he not unnaturally concluded that his family sided with Olive, and saw no reason for his interference. The man, he supposed, was some athletic prodigy, all thews and sinews and robust conceit, whom Jack and Eustace had picked up to worship. But, receiving a second letter, more explanatory in its wounded incoherence, though moved to deeper laughter, he felt it time to bestir himself.

She had set the Cumnors against Olive's inamorato upon information furnished by a friend, who now turned round and reviled her; charging her not only with breach of confidence, but with downright lying. 'Do help me to set things right!' the dame implored him. 'Say it was my mistake. Explain matters.'

Though Maurice doffed his hat to Lady Pettigrew—a woman who could preserve such dignity while subsisting as the decoy-duck of foreign hotel-keepers!—he made no haste upon her present errand. It was not till three weeks after hearing her cry that he fulfilled her request and spoke to his father at Sandset. The interval he employed in an inquiry which, because of his daily preoccupation at chambers and in the courts, advanced slowly, step by step.

Hearing that the Oldfields were back in town, he called on them and gathered Mary's views. He then told his wife the story as a thing just heard, and having roused her sympathy for Olive,

blessed her impulse to go at once to Sandset and support the poor child. Though he lodged in Eaton Place, on a footing of manly independence which had won him the consideration of his wife's servants, while Bella was at home he had to be in, under lock and key, by eleven o'clock each night, upon pain of much unpleasantness. But in her absence he did as he liked, having an excellent understanding with the butler. Having posted her off in a fluster of sisterly compassion, he spent the following week-end in Norfolk, interrogating rustics—a class he abhorred by temperament—and paying a call of two hours on Mrs. Ettrick Jones.

He returned to London with new appetite for investigations. There was a woman in the case—another fair one beside Olive—one Gertrude, who, by all accounts, must be entrancing. A stealthy wish to know more of her, obscure like the rise of sap in a tree, made him young and enterprising. Ruffling the Olympian calm of Somerset House, he examined the last will and testament of Hector Moore deceased—the name of Gertrude shone from out its dry provisions; and soon afterwards visited old Thomas Gravesey, a man already slightly known to him, whose talk censed Gertrude's image furiously.

Then, having filled out his brief, on a Saturday afternoon he tackled Sandset. The lawns were sparkling in a flood of sunshine after rain, small birds sang deliriously, and loud cawing of rooks came from a bank of great trees over against the sun. The Squire and Eustace, his first-born, were

sallying forth with guns towards the rookery, when Maurice got out of the hired fly which had brought him from the station.

'Hullo!' they cried in concert.

'I've come till Monday—on business. I should like to speak to you now, dad.'

Maurice turned his father back into the house, regardless of Eustace crying:

'Oh, hang it, Maurice! Keep your blessed business!'

Geoffrey Cumnor of Sandset, a jovial type originally, but chastened by years of battle with agricultural depression, laid aside his gun submissively, though with regret. He was accustomed to comply with the demands of his youngest son.

'Well, my boy, what is it?' he inquired, when they were in his private room and the door was shut; straining after cordiality, but plainly anxious to curtail the interview.

'What's all this about Olive and a Mr. Moore?'

'Hanged if I know, Maurice,' said the Squire miserably. 'She's wrapped up in a fellow she met at that Swiss hotel, where the Pettigrew woman plagued us so to send her. The boys say he's quite impossible. We've had to confiscate his letters unopened: they're locked in my desk here; and made her promise not to write to him. The keepers have been regularly patrolling the park, with orders to let us know at once if they catch any stranger hanging about; for from Eustace's description of him, he'd stick at nothing. And indoors we've done our best to cure her of

the fancy. But she's making herself ill. It's a week since she's been down to any meal, and she'll speak to nobody except your wife and Emily. I can tell you I'm sick of the whole business. There's no tolerating the chap, I'm afraid; though Dicky Farrer, who was dining here the other night, did stick up for him. Dick's in the Embassy at Constantinople, and ran across this man out there. But the Pettigrew was flat in what she said against him.'

Maurice emptied his breast-pocket of a lot of papers before answering.

'Well, she's changed her mind completely. I have a letter here from her. Please read it.'

The Squire read, and his face grew bright with relief; but it clouded again as he objected:

'But he's a bastard, ain't he?'

'No, I find he is not, after no end of inquiring. And, anyhow, he was legally adopted by a man who left him money—a highly estimable man, a parson. . . .'

'Married his cook or something, didn't he?' ruminated the Squire, but Maurice ignored the challenge.

'I have seen that man's will, and assured myself that there has been no wastage of capital since it was executed. Moore could settle between three and four hundred a year on his wife, and of course one would see that he did so. It is not to be mentioned outside this room; but, suppose Olive were to marry what we call well, you'd have to give her a portion worthy of Miss Compton of Sandset, whereas here——'

'Tut, tut, Maurice! She'll have her share, of course, anyhow,' broke in the father indignantly, showing that he saw the point.

'Of course; but at your convenience. I only suggest that you give this Moore the common ground. Ask him down here (that would pledge you to nothing) and see for yourself what he's like. As for Lady Pettigrew, you can take it she was wrong. A friend wrote to her something which she misconstrued. Here, I'll leave all the documents for your perusal. You know what women are, sir!'

The Squire accepted the tribute by a grave nod; and, after a moment's reflection, said:

'I'll think about it. Go and get some tea or something while I talk to Eustace.'

Going out from the study, Maurice met his wife, who at once offered to minister to his creature comfort. She told him all there was to tell concerning Olive, whom she described as at death's door.

'They're keeping letters from her. It's too mean! And have scared her so that she daren't write to him. Her condition is most heart-rending. It makes me cry to be with her.'

'Go and ask the Squire for those letters, and take them up to her,' said Maurice, smiling, as he sipped his tea. 'The deadlock's at an end, you can tell her that from me. Her adored will be here by this time next week.'

'Maurice! You've done all that? Oh, what a dear you are! I'll run at once.'

Having endured his wife's embrace and got

well rid of her, Maurice sought his stepmother, another power in the house. An invalid of studious taste, she was generally to be found with a book on her couch by a window of the drawing-room. She was there now, but the book was laid aside, and the head of Eustace appeared in its place, his body sprawling on the floor beside her. She was stroking his hair with a fond downward look. 'You did what you thought for the best,' Maurice heard her say, and Eustace answered: 'It's been beastly. I'm glad it's over.' Then, as he was withdrawing on tiptoe, they both saw him.

'Oh, here's Maurice! Come in, Maurice!' called the invalid sweetly, turning on him the vague appeal of her great eyes, which seemed to see so much beside the object looked at. Eustace, scorning to move, leaned his head back firmly against her lap and, reddening, glared at the intruder, as if to say: 'You dare sneer!'

Maurice had nothing to tell them beyond what they knew already. All the while he stood by them, talking, the white taper fingers of the invalid arranged and disarranged the head-growth of that great lout of forty. It made him sick, and yet withal there stole into his mood a ridiculous shade of envy for his stupid brother. No one, not even his ridiculous old wife, had ever thought his head worth stroking. As a boy, in this same house, the home of his ancestors from the days of Queen Elizabeth, he had been punished as a coward and untruthful; and since then, in the

outer world, he had distinguished himself by shrewdness and subtlety—qualities respected of women, but not dear to them. Their best love was motherly, requiring the downward look; it was the guerdon of the simple ones like Jack and Eustace.

Leaving that group of affection as soon as he politely could, Maurice went to look for Jack, whom he found at last coming away from the stables. Him he tormented with the old game of the carrot and the ass, offering news of Mary Oldfield and then dexterously withholding it. This he called drawing Jack out, and, when in secretly wounded mood as at present, his brother's disclosure of a passion as direct as hunger, came like brandy to him.

'Shut up!' said Jack at length, perceiving he was mocked.

Maurice then, seeing the sky flushed with sunset, thought it time to go indoors and dress for dinner.

In the drawing-room half an hour later, he had the awkwardness of witnessing another scene of unrestrained family affection, and of again feeling out of it. Olive had entered the room just before him. He beheld her in the arms of Eustace, lifted right off her feet to his height, for convenience of kissing. She made no outcry on the detriment to silk and chiffon. She was crying, hysterical with happiness; her captor kept blinking hard; and the rest of the family, looking on, had moist eyes.

'Say you forgive me!' murmured Eustace. Her

reply was to fling her arms round his neck and press her face against his.

Maurice, though he discerned the unreason of these transports, for the girl was only amenable since she had got her own way, was moved in spite of himself. When Jack had made his peace in the manner prescribed by Eustace, he could have taken Olive to his heart, had she abandoned herself as to the others. He stood there as her deliverer; he had acted friendship to her during the past days, and to pretend for a length of time is half to feel. His hatred of a pretty young sister could hardly just then have survived the warmness of her arms about his neck. But when it came to his turn, she showed embarrassment, seeming ashamed that he should see her crying. She approached him shyly with a whisper: 'Thank you, Maurice.'

She was not in the habit of kissing him, her abstention was nothing remarkable, but his heart that had inclined to soften, turned to stone. To pay her out, he talked of Gertrude in terms well chosen to make her jealous, aired divers anecdotes gathered in his late research, to illustrate Moore's close friendship with another woman; and had the satisfaction of seeing that he spoilt her pleasure.

The little he saw of Gertrude, when, as his father's plenipotentiary, he called on Mr. Moore in London, enlivened the interest he had before felt in her; and his kindness to her so-called cousin when they journeyed down to Sandset together was exaggerated on her account, to be

reported. He upheld the visitor at the introduction and helped out his nervousness with a word or a change of topic, whenever occasion offered throughout the evening, giving him in charge to Bella as the best-natured soul in company.

'That's all right,' he said as they went to bed. 'We're no more terrible than Don Quixote's windmills, once you realize that we are windmills, not ogres, and just avoid our sails.'

Theo, looking tired now that the strain was relaxed, thanked him kindly and said good-night.

# CHAPTER XII

## SANDSET MANOR

Next morning Theo stirred ere it was light. Half awake, he heard the rise of the skylarks, then certain querulous notes from upper branches answered doubtfully, till some bird of leading quashed the drowsy argument with a bell-like call which gave the signal for the matin chorus. High swelled the anthem when he raised his window-blind and saw a paleness spread upon the lawns, giving to clumps of trees the helpless look of folk surrounded by a rising tide. By the time he had dressed and found his way on tiptoe to the front-door, through silent halls, where the ticking of various clocks seemed to follow his movements with alarm, the world outside was crocus-tinted, all purple and egg-yellow, in the risen sun.

A dog of the pointer breed, till then couchant on the edge of the grass, sprang up as the door opened, and ran cringing to meet him, nosing the gravel in self-abasement, advertising some private misdemeanour with the indiscretion of a true repentance. Theo patted the suppliant, who, absolved by the touch, threw care away, and, in a condition of fresh naughtiness, leapt and

curvetted in an eccentric orbit round the director chance had sent him.

By a door in a thick yew hedge they passed to the gardens, which extended to south and westward of the mansion — a labyrinth of shaded walks, with here and there a space of sward enchasing flower-beds. Here was Nature indulged rather than art enforced. The genial carelessness of long possession transpired from the untrimmed shrubberies, the open fencing; you felt sure that the gardeners took their ease as old retainers, that trespassers, if discovered, would not be prosecuted.

A sudden view up a glade of the sleeping house —two gables of old brick and tile, with a stack of twisted chimneys between them; a balustrade of stone, once white, upon a terrace overlooked by oriel windows — thrilled Moore pleasurably, as though the sight gave possession. It condoned much that had seemed unwarrantable in the behaviour of Olive's brethren. Pride was the heritage of such a house; his sense approved it.

'Good-morning, sleep-walker!' Olive herself stood beside him, while he gazed entranced. 'I've been watching you quite a minute, but you never looked. You see, I haven't forgotten your talent for early rising. Hullo! Yoicks! Yoicks! It *is* Yoicks! Come here, wicked dog! Where do you spring from?'

'I found him by the hall-door when I came out just now, and he made me his centre for excursions.'

'What luck! Eustace will be so glad. He

simply adores Yoicks, and Yoicks has been lost a week. We all thought he'd been stolen. Come off the grass, please; it's wet. We'll take Yoicks round to the stables.'

Having seen the dog in safe custody, she led Theo back again through the pleasance to her favourite summer-house, where, sitting opposite, she described to him her late persecution, and laughed at the magnitude of his concern. She did not mind a bit, she could assure him, now it was over. But Theo's grief was rather touching himself, because he had fallen behind her in devotion. He asked humbly:

'What made you like me so?'

'Oh, I don't know!'

She leaned back in her seat more comfortably, and, with hands clasped behind her head, smiled to the dewy leaves, as if pleased with his question in the abstract. After dreaming thus a minute, she shot a glance at him from under half-dropped eyelids, and said with a shy laugh:

'You aren't quite repulsive, you know! . . . Well, let me see. . . . There was that scene with your French friend, and I had to make up for the naughtiness of Jack and Eustace. Then, when I got to talk to you, I think it was because you seemed so friendless and in some ways such a baby! I used to say I should fall in love with some waif whom I could be sure of having all to myself. That was because most men I knew put sport, and other man-things, ever so much before their wives. . . . Everything Eustace said against you struck me as in your favour; because I didn't

want to share you with friends and relatives, and, if they all looked down on you, well—so much the better, from my standpoint. Now I've made my confession. Make yours, sir! You love me?'

Theo gave a silent nod, which, in conjunction with his look at her, outweighed loud protestations.

'More than all the world?'

Another nod.

'More even than the beloved Gertrude?'

This was less a question than a sly home-thrust. As such she marked it by allowing him no chance to answer, rising and changing the subject with:

'Let's move; it's rather cold. And I haven't shown you my garden.'

Emerging soon after upon the drive before the house, they saw Maurice come out of doors to inhale the morning air.

'Oh, bother! Hide quick,' whispered Olive; and, before Theo realized her purpose, she had dragged him back under the garden arch. 'We'll go another way. He didn't see us.'

'I'm afraid he did.'

'Well, it can't be helped. Only he's not a forgiving person; and, for a man who's always treading on people's toes, he's absurdly sensitive. Now there's the breakfast-gong. My garden must wait.'

Following her into the presence of all the Cumnor men assembled for breakfast (the lady of the house and Mrs. Maurice took that meal in the bedchamber), Theo was abashed to meet with

stares of dire amazement. Olive up and dressed by eight o'clock! Olive in time for breakfast! There was no end of exclamation on the rare occurrence.

'I was just taking Mr. Moore to see my garden when we heard the gong,' said Olive, brass to them, as she took her seat.

'Olive's garden is like my bookcase—never troubled by the owner,' said Jack, with conscious merit.

'Good!' Maurice applauded. 'Sign that, Jacko, and we'll have it framed and hung up somewhere.'

'We've great news for you, Eustace,' said Olive. 'Yoicks is home again.'

'Never!'

'Theo found him early this morning.'

'What found him? I failed to catch. Retribution, doubtless, in some novel form,' said Maurice, with the face of intelligent interest.

Eustace asked:

'Where is he now?'

'We took him round to the stables and gave him in charge of your particular boy.'

'Well, I *am* glad!' and for the first time Eustace turned of his own accord to Moore, asking: 'Where exactly did you find him?'

When the party dispersed after breakfast Maurice said in Theo's ear:

'You've done wonders with my brother, thanks to Yoicks! Improve the occasion, and the day is ours.'

In delivering this charge, Maurice had in view

his eldest brother's known distaste for demonstration of any kind; to seem to pay court to Eustace being, in fact, to offend him. Theo, who had quite forgotten the episode of the garden arch, suspecting no ulterior motive, thanked him for the hint. Not long after, seeing Eustace sally forth with Yoicks in barking attendance, he made haste to overtake him.

'Seems none the worse for his travels,' he opened fire, taking notice of the dog.

'No, he'd take care of himself.'

'May I walk with you?'

'Oh, if you like. But you'll find it dull. I'm only going to the farm to join my brother. The yard's a quagmire, bad for those town boots. We're farmers, you see.'

'I'll come if I may. I've been watching for a chance to speak to you. I hope you think better of me now than you did at Montreux.'

Eustace vouchsafing no answer in the pause allowed for one, Theo pursued:

'I want to be friends. You must, I think, acquit me of self-interest in my attachment to your sister.'

'Oh, that's all right!' groaned Eustace, as one sick unto death. 'Can't you let it rest?'

'I want to arrive at an understanding.'

'Well, I don't; that's flat! You should keep to Maurice; he'll split hairs with you. If you want my frank opinion, I shall be devilish sorry if my sister marries you; but I'd rather see her married to you than unhappy. If the thing comes off, as it now seems likely to do, Jack and I will

be friendly so long as you make her happy. There were points in your behaviour at Montreux that looked fishy, and I thought your coming home when we did pretty bad form. But then, I admit, we were rude to you—I was, at any rate—and don't set up to judge. Can't say I like you, but I'm not your enemy. Go now, and let's bury the subject. Yoicks! To heel, sir!'

Theo, greatly disconcerted, sauntered back to the house, intending to report his ill-success to Maurice, who, however, was nowhere to be found. He had put his head into the billiard-room to find it empty, and was standing cogitating in the passage leading thence to kitchen purlieus, when Olive issued from a door nearly opposite, in talk with Emily, who at home joined other duties to those of lady's-maid, and now had her arms full of table linen.

'Theo,' was called at sight of him, 'please speak to Emily! She may come and live with us, mayn't she? She would like to, but is afraid of your objecting—such nonsense! Give her a good scolding!'—Theo contrived to smile upon the terrified old servant, who clung to her armful of linen as to the horns of an altar, though privately sore dismayed by this addition to his liabilities.—'We can't do without her, can we? Tell her so!'—Theo complied as best he could.—'There, now you've heard for yourself; he thinks as I do. So that's settled.'—The maid fled side-long with her snowy burden.—'Now we'll go out,' said Olive cheerfully. 'Just wait one minute while I get a hat.'

She took the command airily as of right, and her delight in so doing was infectious. For Theo, his condition as slave of her caprice involved a surprise at every turn, which kept him interested. Maurice had warned him that he would find her a handful; he now felt the force of the admonition, but, choosing rather to view her as an armful, was exhilarated, not afraid.

At lunch Eustace and Jack appeared in fits over something which had happened at the farm. A man, to whom they had sold a sow named Amy, had said something which they could not repeat. Olive glanced significantly at Theo, to see if he remembered the parallel instance of Paul Tessier. Bella, who was easily convulsed, kept moaning, 'Do stop them, some one!' near her last gasp. The Squire got angry; Maurice sneered at them in vain; it was a mild rebuke from Mrs. Cumnor which at length brought them to order. When all was quiet again Theo got a smile from Eustace, as much as to say, 'We now understand one another.'

'Well, Moore, have you made up your mind to come back with me on Monday?' asked Maurice towards the end of the meal.

'I must insist on his staying longer than that,' the Squire answered for his guest. 'We've asked Dick Farrer here to meet him on Tuesday night.'

'What will the fair Gertrude say if you stop on?'

Maurice's gaze veered round to Olive and pinned her down for observation like a butterfly.

'Oh, I have her leave,' smiled Theo, in the same tone.

'Leave, indeed!' said Olive under her breath.

'Who's the lady?' asked her father curiously.

'Theo's cousin, who puts him up when he's in town.'

'The loveliest girl I ever saw!' corrected Maurice. 'Well, I must call on her, Moore, and let her know how you're getting on.'

'I've no doubt she'll be pleased to see you!'

'Don't mind him, darling!' cried Bella, noting Olive's angry face, and pointing out her teasing husband. She nodded violently to her young sister-in-law, sounding the gulf of forty years between them by a childish giggle. 'I don't rise to it any longer now I know him. You shan't vex her any more, you horrid man! She's under my wing.'

And the kind old creature bridled till her chin appeared a dimple, ogling her lord with defiance.

'Oh, I know Maurice!' said Olive bitterly, mortified at having attention called to her distress.

The phrase was oft recurring in the family concert, and given forth staccato, had a ring of sheer vexation which belied its meaning. No one knew Maurice, that was the standing grievance; and Maurice knew all their weak points. He had so extolled Gertrude to Olive, that now the least reminder of that woman holding Theo by his childhood was enough to fire her cheeks. She had never known Maurice make a false assertion, truth always weighted his ill-natured

thrusts; this Gertrude was all he proclaimed her to be. And Theo, of course, must be very fond of her. How fond exactly she meant shortly to find out. But it was not a matter she cared to investigate while Maurice was in the house. She wished to be rid of his sneer and the prying eyeglass before conducting so unreasonable an inquisition.

When the calm of unanimity was restored to the household, she made herself charming but elusive, fled not too far before Theo between a laugh and a pout; with the result that, as a matter of course, he followed. On the evening when Dick Farrer came to dinner she made love to the said Dick, whom she had known from babyhood, in a degree only appreciable by a lover, so that Theo was glum, and in the smoking-room afterwards drew close to Jack on account of a wise remark the latter made about women always tormenting the men they loved. Jack's passion for Mary Oldfield was like a lion's wound, proclaimed with no uncertain sound. Every evening after dinner he was moved to make open confession of it; and Theo, for that once, was a sympathetic listener.

Next morning Olive let herself be caught alone in the summer-house, and burst out at once, to forestall his eager questions:

'You don't love me, Theo—not enough! I've been observing you and thinking.'

'I swear I do!'

'Don't swear; you might perjure yourself. Do you love me best in all the world?'

'Of course.'

'"Of course" puts it out of the question. It can't be "of course" so soon.'

'Of course, since I'm here at Sandset. It's the reason why I'm here.'

'But it's impossible; you hardly know me.'

'I might retort that! But I believe the case is not unprecedented. This kind of revelation comes often like a lightning-flash.'

'You talk on stilts; I wish you wouldn't. It makes me think of Maurice, who is never quite in earnest.'

'Is your quarrel with me earnest?'

'Quarrel! Where? How? I'm not quarrelling,' she cried in grand amazement. 'Well, I forgive you, if you really love me.'

That was but the first act of her inquiry, which took the dramatic form, as every process is apt to do with passionate women in whom thought, emotion, action are a unity.

Presently, in their friendly talk, she said:

'Tell me about your friend—your cousin—Gertrude! You've hardly spoken of her. What's she like?'

He answered with an embarrassed laugh:

'I can't describe anyone I know so well.'

'You do love some one better than me, I fancy?'

'I don't!' said Theo stoutly. 'There's no comparison. What would you say to me if I were to start up a jealousy of Eustace, your favourite brother?'

'Oh, please! I'm not jealous. But all the same, she's not your sister.'

'She's that to me — and more,' said Theo Irishly.

'And more — so I thought. Perhaps you'd better explain yourself further. It's not my wish to take you from anyone.'

'It's silly to talk like that, when she's got a husband of her own. I want you to know her too, and make a friend of her.'

'Thanks! How truly charming! I suppose she's highly experienced and will instruct me in all things. Oh, I'm sure I shall like her!'

The biting tone of her forecast made Theo look hard at Olive; and she, being unprepared for his scrutiny just then, and unwilling to pursue the quarrel, since he was to depart on the morrow, took suggestion from his wondering smile, and smiled too, vowing she had been in joke.

## CHAPTER XIII

### OLIVIA IS QUITE CHARMED

'I'VE got news for you, Theo,' said Gertrude on the evening of his return to her. Dinner over, Harry had left them precipitately, as he invariably did, on production of Theo's pipe and tobacco-pouch. 'Mr. Maurice Cumnor dined here on Monday; and from his talk I gathered that you would come back more than ever impatient to find work, so I set out to see what I could do. Mr. Gravesey wants you to be at his office in Finsbury Pavement next Wednesday punctually at eleven.'

She had planted both her elbows on the table, and, with chin resting in the cup of her joined hands, was surveying him comfortably as from a tower.

'Have I done wrong?' she asked presently, seeing he did not look glad.

'I'm most grateful to you. But what cheek of that fellow Maurice!'

He would not show her the true reason of his disenchantment. On the journey up from Sandset he had experienced nothing but desolation, had looked back to Olive's waywardness as all

his pleasure in life; the house at St. John's Wood, with its stucco graces, had chilled him in the approach, the road of suburban elegance, with its few grimed trees, wearing the hopeless look of things left stranded as he trode its pavement in the dun of evening; the whole region—colourless, spiritless, voiceless, save for an occasional blare of street-music, or the bitter cry of some itinerant salesman—had grown anathema to him. He had entered the house a prey to that irritation with everything and everybody which besets the enthusiast torn from his loved pursuit; and now, after little more than an hour, he was not only pleased to be there, but slightly incredulous of his great enthusiasm. That Gertrude should have been so active on his behalf as to bring employment, and with it realization of his fondest hopes, within the realm of probability, was no longer matter for unalloyed thanksgiving.

In the silence growing heavy between them, he had vision of her more distinctly than ever before, and with more of emotion. Across the table littered with dessert, and freshened by a sheaf of jonquils in the midst, she sat watching, while he smoked, with friendly patience, waiting for the slight awkwardness to pass, in no haste for explanations. Her hands held up against her face to screen the eyes from candle-flames on either side, compressed her cheeks to a chubbiness which reminded him pathetically of their common childhood. The contours of her nut-brown hair caught light bewitchingly, and her eyes, in the shadow of her hands, were truth itself. He felt

petty and abashed before her; annoyingly so, having been once her king.

During the four years of his absence in the East there had sprung up this disquieting phenomenon: her superiority. Her intelligence still lacked the range and versatility of his, but there was manifest in all its judgments a serene consistency, which, in a sense, enthroned her. It was at one with her soul and body, the inspiration of her thoughts and actions; whereas his own was like a flag at a ship's stern—showy, but useless, in the wake of impulse.

He had left behind a girl who worshipped, to find on his return a woman who understood him; and was conscious of some loss in the exchange. At length, tired of waiting for him, she broke the silence.

'I didn't think it "cheek" of Mr. Cumnor. He called on Monday to tell me how you were getting on, and we prevailed on him to stay to dinner. I like him much, and so does Harry.'

'Oh, I dare say he's right enough,' murmured Theo, who had forgotten the topic. 'Only I heard one or two stories down at Sandset which make me sorry he should be your friend.'

She looked hard at him, mocking his grave face.

'And, pray, who was your informant?'

'One who should know—his brother Jack.'

'Oh, I've heard about Jack! He's the one who was in the army, and got into such hot water—debt and much besides—that his father, having got him out of it, decided to keep him at home

evermore. I heard he'd developed into the moralist of the family.'

'From Maurice?'

She nodded, with a twinkle of the shaded eyes.

'Well, all the same, I should like you to be on your guard with Maurice. You know what you are to me. . . .'

She cried out suddenly:

'Don't, Theo! How dense you are to-night! How you insult me! "Be on my guard," indeed!' She got up and extinguished the candle nearest to her. 'Now suppose we join Harry.'

Reduced in the flash of an eye from her friend and equal to a mere attendant, Theo followed her in bewilderment. Was this the child he had been used to tyrannize, the girl for whom his will had been divine law? She had put him down severely for the sake of Maurice Cumnor, a mere stranger. He felt aggrieved, and, on his grievance, the thought of Olive, eclipsed a moment, shone forth with renewed splendour. Gertrude was at once herself again. But she neither explained nor sought to mitigate her show of temper; and Maurice, calling a second time, was made welcome. The thing stood silent in his mind against her.

'Don't forget your appointment for next Wednesday,' she charged him repeatedly.

He promised punctuality. But when the morning came, and he prepared to start, a telegram was put in his hand.

'Meet me St. Pancras eleven.—OLIVIA.'

It was a leaden morning, without a gleam save that of steady rain-lines, and he had been feeling dejected. But, on reading the message, his face brightened wonderfully.

'I can't see old Gravesey to-day. I must wire to him.'

'You *must* see him!' urged Gertrude. 'He has asked some one else to meet you.'

'It's a nuisance, but it can't be done. I can't disappoint her!'

'Her! Now I see!' Gertrude visibly resigned herself. 'It may wreck your prospects with such a very punctilious old gentleman. Could I meet Olive and bring her on to you?'

'No, she's going shopping. She told me she might be coming up one day, and would let me know. Besides, it wouldn't do; you might not recognize her.'

'Well, Theo, look here: I'll keep the appointment for you.'

'If you only would!'

'I will, if you give me full powers; and then, for a reward, I claim to lunch with you, to make her acquaintance and report progress.'

It was impossible, without a knowledge of Olive's plans, to say where they might be at lunch-time; but Theo engaged to be at a point in Regent Street at one o'clock, and kept his engagement, though teased by Olive, who was in tyrant mood, to break it. Could he not exist so few hours without Gertrude? She had counted on having him alone, but supposed she must make the best of it, and so on.

The theatre of these reproaches was a four-wheeled cab, an infamy to which they were reduced by the adherence of the maid Emily, who could not honourably be squeezed into a hansom, on the way from St. Pancras Station to a shop in Oxford Street. Theo entered the shop with Olive, at her command, but found himself out of place in the debates which there ensued. The maid, a chattel in the cab, here resumed the status of a human being, and was much consulted.

'I'm off now to meet Gertrude. Shall I find you here?' he said at length.

'Oh, possibly, if you aren't too long.'

Her ungracious words harrowed him as he emerged into the wet streets, now mirroring a stretch of pale blue sky, as cold as steel, laid bare by the dispersing rain-clouds. The glow of the flower-sellers' baskets wept on to the pavement. There were no fixed tints nor forms, all seeming to gutter and run down vaguely as in the process of a general liquefaction. Hurrying faces wore a bleak and harassed look, those of loiterers expressed disgust. At length he came across a face of glee.

It was Gertrude's, smiling to him beneath a very modish hat, which conferred on it the one charm he had thought it never could possess, that of high fashion. Her whole dress, a thing of French provocation, was of a piece with the hat. Seeing her thus arrayed, it went to his heart to disappoint her of the lunch with Olive, but dread of a cold reception for her nerved him to the task.

'I think you'd better not come, after all,' he said, with marked reserve.

But she laughed.

'I'm coming, Theo. However cross she is, I claim it as my right to-day. I've got you a place of two hundred a year, and you can marry when you like.'

Resigned, but unconvinced, he led the way, brooding on the unpleasant knack she had acquired of making him her shadow by a smile when it so pleased her. He dared not adumbrate the fate in store for them.

But — another disconcertion! — bringing Gertrude to his betrothed, he met the sweetest smiles, and saw his cousin welcomed as a dear one long expected. Actual coals of fire could not more hotly have reproached his doubts of Olive, and the indiscretion of that hint to Gertrude. They went out to lunch, parting at the door of the shop from Emily, who, seeing her mistress had a lady with her, foraged independently.

Close by, in a side-street, a quiet backwater of the great thoroughfare, stood a house of refreshment much patronized by ladies shopping. Though fully licensed as a restaurant, it preserved the guileless aspect and confiding manners of a pastrycook's shop. Thither Gertrude led them, saying it was her treat. In the hour between one and two o'clock the place was crowded, a feminine Babel, which deafened and confounded Theo. After some waiting, they were accommodated with a vacant table, and sat down, Gertrude and Olive chatting vigorously.

'I've done a stroke of business for Theo this morning,' proclaimed the former. 'A merchant who trades largely with Greece and Turkey wants him for a kind of superior clerk, or secretary to overlook his foreign correspondence and advise him in matters Oriental. Theo is to have a room to himself, and be accountable only to the head of the house. He'll have two hundred a year to start with, and afterwards, when he has proved his usefulness, a salary to be agreed upon. . . .'

'Too good to be true!' gasped Theo.

The talk between the women passed to other topics. Theo, scanning the room, saw a flowered bonnet violently nodding, and, recognizing the face beneath it, called Olive's attention to the neighbourhood of Lady Pettigrew. But Olive only dropped a bow and perfunctory smile in the direction indicated, and sighing 'What a bother!' resumed her tilt with Gertrude. Theo then, being out of their talk at the moment, felt it devolved on him to go across to the old lady and ask how she did. He was repaid by her evident gratification, and the eagerness with which she begged him to forget what had passed at Montreux. She had been misinformed and must apologize. She was at present staying with the Maurice Cumnors.

'You've done very wisely to make a friend of Maurice. Between ourselves, he has more brains than all the rest of them put together.'

Theo regained his seat facing Gertrude and Olive, to hear the latter also hymning praise of

Maurice with a fervour he knew for the very opposite of her real sentiments. With his return the topic was abandoned, but he had heard enough to make him question the sincerity of her delight in Gertrude. Her charms, brought out in the colloquy, made him her accomplice, only anxious lest Gertrude should discover the deceit in practice. He thus draped Gertrude as his conscience for the time being, and obscured her radiance.

Lady Pettigrew, in her way out, stopped to exchange a few words with them, addressing the bulk of her civilities to Gertrude, whose acquaintance she was delighted to make, having heard so much of her, she said, looking at Theo so as archly to charge him with a loquacity which belonged of right to Maurice Cumnor. Seeing the dame unattended and burdened with parcels, Theo offered service. He called a cab and handed her into it, while she chatted to him confidentially as an old friend.

'We shall meet again often, I hope. I'm going to call on your cousin this week with Mrs. Maurice. Mary Oldfield, too, would like to know her. You remember Mary? Quite a friend of yours. I wish she'd make up her mind about poor Jack Cumnor. So hard on a man to be kept dangling like that. If you know anybody in need of mountain-air, please let me know. I have heard of the most delightful spot in the Vaudois Alps—quite unsophisticated and retired. My hope is to keep it select; I wouldn't tell just anyone. . . . Thank you so very much. Good-bye! Good-bye!'

Having received the benison of her waving hand as the cab drove off, Theo went back to his post of onlooker at a smooth duel of feminine wits. Gertrude kept thrusting at the heart of Olive, who regularly caught the thrust on her shield of effusive cordiality.

'I've still got some purchases to make. Do come and help me choose!' said Olive when they issued forth at length.

Tardy sunshine now gilded the wet streets, raising a dazzle which perplexed the sight.

'Not for worlds. I won't intrude a minute longer; I'm so glad to know you at last.'

'So am I—delighted! Theo, escort your cousin. You know where to find me.'

'Not on any account. Theo knows better than to treat me with ceremony.'

Even after Gertrude was gone, Olive maintained that delighted manner which she had used against her; and Theo, learning caution, gave free play to her generosity by abstaining from aught that could be construed into praise of Gertrude.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ASSIDUITIES OF MAURICE CUMNOR

Gertrude risked no verdict on her new acquaintance. She alluded to the meeting once or twice, but casually, and without divulging her impressions. That she was still favourable to Theo's marriage appeared in her loyal efforts to forward that event. She implored him to lose no time in securing the post she had bespoken for him, and, when that was done and he had entered on his duties, inspired him to write forthwith to Olive's father. But he knew her capable of waiving her own lights to advise him in the spirit of his desire of the moment; and there was now a reserve in her companionship, a little dignity imposing limits, which made him doubt if her approval could be quite whole-hearted.

When Mr. Cumnor wrote agreeably, pronouncing a dislike to long engagements, Gertrude dealt in felicitations where he wanted sympathy. She tacitly refused to talk things over with him. Did he tell of woes attending his initiation in the ways of business, of novice blunders clothing him in shame, she made no offer to console or cheer him, but coolly showed him his reward in Olive.

Yet, in all practical matters, she remained his friend of old and willing helper. She devoted many days to selecting a suitable home for him, and would have spared him endless trouble over furniture, had not Olive, whom he now saw once a week, vetoed her interference, forcing him to seem ungracious. She accepted her dismissal as frankly as she had offered her services. His shamed excuses met a pleasant smile. He could not make it out at all, but fancied he could connect her changed demeanour with the growing frequency of Maurice in the house.

Returning from his work through the noisy summer evenings, he as often as not found Maurice in her drawing-room. The closest relations were in a fair way to be established between the house in St. John's Wood and that in Eaton Place. Bella had come with pageant of carriage and pair to deliver up her heart to Gertrude; who, before succumbing to the visitor's unbounded kindness, was struck by the funny likeness in her fat old face, nodding and becking beneath a little toque all flowers, to some old Roman emperor, she thought Vitellius. Gertrude was drawn into a whirl of gaieties, in which, for a wonder, Harry chose to join; transformed, he too, by this new social influence. Theo morosely declined all invitations. He was tired, he alleged, in the evenings. But in truth he only held aloof as a dumb and dignified reproach to Gertrude for forgetting him in the pursuit of shallow pleasure. Debarred from advice and sympathy in the quarter where he had been used to fly for both, and chafed

by a routine of work as irksome to his habits of expatiation as a strait waistcoat, he was driven to idolize desire of Olive, and looked forward through the week to Sunday spent at Sandset as the round of daylight at a tunnel's mouth. Yet those week-end visits were not all rapture. He could not feel at ease with Olive's family. Their guardedness impaired his pleasure even in the society of the girl herself, marring it with circumspection, like a storm in prospect. Her brother Eustace kept him civilly at arm's length, while Jack was cordial only in secret and in a manner of conscious weakness. The Squire used a 'There, there' sort of heartiness to fend him off, seeming afraid to be left alone with him. But Theo's chief discomfort in that house arose from the attitude of the invalid mother. From the moment of his entering a room wherein she lounged, Mrs. Cumnor's great dark orbs never released him. They were like Olive's eyes in shape and colour, but stilled and solemnized as by some dread experience. All the vitality of her emaciated form was there collected in a trance of vision. Move as he would about the room, they moved with him fixedly, like the eyes in a portrait. He could fancy that they viewed him with the kind of horror wherewith a seer might gaze upon a destined parricide.

Concerning this and other disagreeables he longed to unburden his mind to Gertrude. But she discouraged confidences of a personal nature, especially those having to do with his emotions as a lover. He was shut out from home, face to

face with his own consternation, which grew in measure as he approached wedlock.

On marriage generally, whether as sacrament or social problem, he had had no time to meditate, all his mental energies having been absorbed in the process of getting acquainted with his bride to be. Now, with its imminence, the magnitude of the undertaking scared him. He was alone in a fragile barque hurled on towards the brink of a fall which thundered in his ears; the time to reconsider was gone by; it was now too late to do anything but look out. He could not be said to think at all; he simply glared at the impending catastrophe.

Engrossed by considerations so entirely selfish, it never struck him that Gertrude, whose indifference was his standing grievance, might herself be passing through a phase of life at least as critical and anxious as that he traversed with such inward moaning. He had forgotten her tale of domestic trouble which had distressed him at his first home-coming; when one evening, going into the drawing-room on his return from business, he heard Maurice say:

'A flat's the ticket! You must have a flat.'

Mr. Gravesey was in the room, besides Gertrude and her husband, in grave council. A look of 'Hush!' on Gertrude's face apprised the barrister of Theo's entrance at his back.

'Who must have a flat?' asked the intruder, made more inquisitive by their conscious silence.

'You must!' flung Maurice over his shoulder.

Mr. Gravesey, who sat nursing a knee and frowning at it, growled :

'I hear you stick to work, Theo, now you've found an inducement, better than was to be expected from your antecedents. My friend Taylor gives the best accounts of you. You have only to persevere. And—mind, young man!—no backward looks! No hankerings after a roving life! A roving life's no thrift for cat or dog.'

But Theo would not be put off.

'Who is to have a flat ?' he still persisted.

Further joking evasions on the part of Maurice were checked by Gertrude saying with a blush :

'You may as well know, Theo. I'm to have the flat. Harry stipulates that I shall live in London, and Mr. Cumnor suggested a flat for me, as much more home-like than the best of lodgings.'

'You'll need at least one good servant,' murmured Harry, with the frown of computation. 'Now, there's Jane, our present parlourmaid—the very thing. Can she cook, I wonder ? Can she sew ?' He took out a pocket-book and began at once to jot down headings for the examination Jane must undergo.

'You don't really mean to separate !' cried Theo, horrified, at the same time directing a fastidious gaze on Maurice, who, to his apprehension, had no business there. 'What will become of Harry ?'

'Oh, that's settled. I shall go on here as usual, snapped Captain Elphinstone irritably, resenting interruption of his careful jottings. 'And Gertrude will come and stay with me. I believe that's

in the contract.' He looked for confirmation on this point to Maurice, who nodded:

'Certainly.'

The sight of Maurice thus pontificating at the sacrifice of what he believed to be Gertrude's welfare caused Theo's brain to throb with sudden anger.

'I thought you were out of town,' he said offensively. 'It's vacation, isn't it?'

He received the soft answer:

'It is; but, as I get on in life, and practice grows, I find it necessary to work almost as hard in vacation as in term-time. A fortnight to three weeks is now the longest summer holiday that, as an ambitious man, I can allow myself.'

Then, ere he could disgrace himself further, Gertrude called Theo off into the window, where she stood in contemplation of the opposite house-fronts, on which the evening light reposed like a fixed smile. Without turning her head, she took him to task severely for his rudeness. It shamed her to see him so hot-headed, like a silly boy. Mr. Cumnor had nothing whatever to do with the decision he chose to deplore, beyond the interest natural in a friend. The separation was entirely of her own seeking, as she had told him long ago, if he condescended to remember.

'It's really you, Theo, who have precipitated matters, though quite innocently, by your natural impatience to get married. Life here has been bearable with you to talk to; it will seem more desolate than ever when you are gone. So, you see, you did wrong to be angry with Mr. Cumnor.

At any rate, you might have considered that he is my friend, in my drawing-room.'

While she spoke she kept plucking at the light foliage of some ferns set up upon a stand beside her, thus subconsciously betraying an emotion which her level tones coldly repudiated.

'But why have him in it at all?' he asked despairingly. The explanation he had so long sought from her deepened his fateful gloom instead of dissipating it. That he should have failed her in her need, however blindly, depressed him with a sense of all-round failure.

To his question she replied almost savagely:

'Ask Harry! I didn't want him. Harry must needs confide in him without asking me. But it has turned out for the best, and I may tell you that no one living could have shown more tact in a trying position than the man you so foolishly distrust. He has been my true friend, has smoothed things wonderfully — made it easier than I ever thought it could be. Even Mr. Gravesey says we could not anywhere have found a more capable adviser.'

Theo, argumentatively squashed, found strength to murmur:

'What will aunt say?'

'I tremble to think,' said Gertrude, turning to him for the first time, with a smile which proved contagious. 'I shan't tell her yet awhile. Your wedding is excitement enough for the present. She dreams of it every night, dear soul! It was really sweet of your betrothed to write herself and invite her. But I'm a little troubled about

her health; the Sisters at the Home rather put upon her. She's so willing, they forget how old she is.'

Maurice taking leave put an end to their private talk; and Gertrude did not again revert to the topic of the separation. It was from Harry Theo heard soon after that a flat had been chosen and was being furnished.

From the moment when Maurice Cumnor had called the proposed enlargement an interesting experiment, Captain Elphinstone had exchanged his reluctant acquiescence for lively pride in the scheme. It became incorporated with his system of self-denial, a part of that heavy armour wherein he somewhat boastfully defied the devil which had once possessed him. He claimed now to be its organizer and sole exponent, covering in this capacity a great deal of paper with abstruse calculations of surprising neatness. He never tired of drawing plans of the flat for Theo, indicating the position of such pieces of furniture as were already purchased by tiny rings and squares. He was stone to other subjects of conversation. To conduct Theo through the rooms when nearly finished was a treat to which he looked forward with rubbing of hands.

About a month before the day appointed for his marriage, Theo discontinued his visits to Sandset Manor. It was then that, one fine Sunday afternoon, Harry led him to inspect the new abode; Gertrude herself preceding them in a cab, with Jane, the parlourmaid, and a large basket containing the materials of afternoon tea.

The two men went by omnibus to the Marble Arch, walked across the park to Albert Gate, and there escaladed a second public conveyance on its way down Sloane Street.

The flat was situated at the top of high new buildings in the heart of Chelsea, looking out over an infinitude of humble roofs, which had at all times the wistfulness of poor multitudes, and to-day derived quite a spiritual beauty from the glide of sunlit vapours over them, with soft woodcut effects of light and shadow.

'There's a view!' said Harry in his pride as showman; but he allowed no pause for appreciation, dragging Theo off from the window to inspect sundry articles of furniture, his choice and present.

They were in this occupation when a ring at the bell roused conjectures, and Gertrude sped to the door. Rather to Theo's disgust, she let in Maurice Cumnor.

'Well, what do you think of it, Moore?' inquired the new-comer in the friendliest way. 'Our recluse won't be badly housed, will she?'

Harry made haste to remind Theo that the furnishing was not yet complete. The rooms would look much nicer in a week or two.

'But it's snug already, isn't it?' he added with self-satisfaction. 'And these flats are unexceptionable. The agents are most particular; they tell me they've refused a host of would-be tenants. The hall downstairs looks comfortable, and it's useful to have a porter and a lift. On the whole, I don't see how we could have done better.'

But Theo hardly listened. He was watching a conference of Gertrude and Maurice. The latter's posture, compact of respect and good-fellowship, left, he was sorry to note, nothing to be desired. He asked to be furnished with reasons for distrusting his future brother-in-law, but the boon was denied him.

Over Harry, it was plain to see, Maurice had acquired complete ascendency, thanks, probably, to his legal knowledge and the genius he displayed for presenting everyday conjunctures in the light of puzzles, amusing to unravel and discuss.

'I was thinking as I came along that the large buffet would go better in the hall than in the dining-room,' he observed now, thoughtfully.

In a trice Harry was all agog to know his grounds for so thinking, to take measurements and compare the two sites.

'I don't know what I should have done without Mr. Cumnor,' Gertrude told Theo, standing at the window of the dining-room while the discussion raged in and out. By his side she gazed out on gold mists trailing over the vague sea of housetops, individualized here and there in some church roof and spire, some many-windowed factory or board-school, like a wading leviathan. 'He led Harry here, knowing how I should glory in the look-out on this kind of wilderness. All along he has managed Harry for me, quite as if he knew my difficulties, and had been asked to help me.'

'I've been so fearfully rushed myself,' Theo

muttered shamefacedly, feeling an implied reproach, and very envious of the praises earned by Maurice.

'Don't I know?' she smiled, with wide indulgence. 'But I should like one day—one good long day—of you all to myself before you leave us. May I have that? We'll go to Barford, and say good-bye to old days.'

Theo consenting with emotion, she appointed the eve of his wedding, perhaps for contrast.

## CHAPTER XV

### A PILGRIMAGE

Gertrude's petition for a day alone with him had been hailed by Theo as a sign that she relented, and would return to her old allegiance. But nothing of the kind appeared from her subsequent behaviour; and when the day came for their excursion to Barford, she was provokingly free from the sentimentality which, considering the occasion, he had a right to expect.

Descending the stairs very early, before the servants were afoot, he found her down before him. Fully dressed for the start, she was on her knees in the gaslit kitchen, nursing a fire which already roared in the flues. He was immediately required to lay the table, bring water in a kettle, cut slices of bread for toast; while she fried some bacon and eggs for their private breakfast. Her remarks were confined to directions till all was ready, when, standing to pour out tea, she observed it was a cold morning. Theo maintained glum silence, feeling ill at ease and somehow duped. He now suspected her design in this expedition to resemble that of the justiciary angel who drags erring souls by the hair remorsefully to survey their lost happiness.

The rest of the house still slumbered when they went out, and the noise of the closing door resounded oddly. There was a vacant yawn in the chill air. Never had the streets seemed so deserted. It was dark, and rows of lights down every vista looked religious in the utter stillness. Down in Maida Vale the broad reaches of the Edgware Road were dead and empty. The last of the country vans had gone to market, the daytime traffic had not yet begun. Faint, ghostly sounds of wheels, that drew no nearer, enhanced the desolation of the hour.

After walking a mile or more down the echoing highway, Theo espied a crawling hansom, and hailed the driver, who, startled out of sleep, made hoarse response.

'We might have ordered a cab overnight, and saved this long tramp,' he murmured as he helped her in.

She answered with raised brows:

'I meant to walk most of the way, or we need not have started so soon. You used to be fond of early walks.'

At that his self-love cocked a ready ear, and strained forward, eager for the touch of sentiment. But her face of careless acquiescence as she leaned back in the cab denied him further encouragement. It was something, however, to know that she had considered his likes and dislikes. She might not, after all, be meaning to ill-use him.

Something comforted by this reflection, he unbent sufficiently to smoke a pipe.

By then it grew daylight; street lamps had drawn in their rays, and peered shortsightedly. The road before them assumed the colour of wood-smoke; it ran between what seemed steep cliffs of lava, swept by a shrewish wind that had arisen with the dawn. The lamps went out as they advanced; upper windows on one side gleamed forth whitely. Dull-faced, heavy-footed men, grey as the hour, trudged along the pavements to their daily work. A milk-cart rang past with its merry cans; a trolley laden with long iron bars deafened them for the moment as it lumbered by. Here and there a cry was heard above the whisper growing with the light. By the time they approached Liverpool Street, there reigned a saffron flush beyond the station roofs; the world was turned to dreamy blue, and murmured wakefully.

The sun shone gold on windows of the train that bore them out over East End roofs towards their own country; and he, now full of cheerful warmth, enjoyed the sentimental aspect of their trip together. But she had brought a book, and now must read it. Times were changed from the days when he, the preoccupied one, had been accustomed to rebuke her chatter.

Out in the country the sun forsook them, leaving a dull day, greyer than the dawn had been. But as they took the road at their destination, a ray pierced the cloud and ran like the dimple of a smile across the chessboard landscape. Another, and another followed; the shadows of small trees, lately planted beside the way, came and went

upon the ground before them. By the time they left the road and struck into a hedgerow path descending towards some marshland, the country sparkled in broad sunshine. Theo no longer felt desire to talk.

Over meadows from which the aftermath had just been carted, a blue eye of summer watched the stealth of autumn. Willow-trees beside the dykes shrank Godiva-like behind their showered tresses. A wood of orchards with a little spire, appearing in the distance, made him say: 'There's Barford!' Gertrude did not answer. Words were discarded as too rough an instrument. It occurred to him then to doubt whether Gertrude's silence, which he had ascribed to coldness, might not all the time have proceeded from stress of emotion. But a little later, when, having crossed a footbridge and climbed an orchard lane, they entered the churchyard, his first suspicions of her returned, causing a dizziness.

He stood beside a white cross, inscribed to the memory of 'Hector Moore, Priest, thirty-five years vicar of this parish.' The name and age were on the pedestal of the cross; on the flat tombstone was written: 'He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved,' and at an interval: 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' Gertrude, kneeling upon the stone, arranged some flowers which she had brought to lay there. And Theo was conscious, with dumb anger, that she was not thinking of what she was doing, but intensely of him, forcing him to review his past life and admit his blind folly in turning his back

on all home things to consort with a strange woman whom he but half liked. She was forcing him to feel as he felt, and he could not resist here, in the shadow of the old church, with home sounds in his ears, and a wind that breathed of home stirring the trees. She might have played a kinder part, on their last day. At least, he could deny her the satisfaction of knowing what he felt.

He wore a nonchalant air when they left the churchyard by another gate, which opened on the village street. A man employed with two others in thatching a wheat-stack cried aloud from that eminence, waving his hat. A boy dashed headlong out of the rickyard to spread the tidings of their arrival. Going to lunch at the inn, they were overtaken by a buxom dame, out of breath and hatless, who flung one arm round Gertrude's neck and kissed her, while with the other she reached out for Theo's hand and squeezed it vigorously. Two little girls, carried along in her wake, claimed their meed of notice by repeated curtsies. By sheer force of good-will, she led them captive to her own abode, where, in a close parlour, she set before them of the best she had, declaiming intermittently on the fallen state of the parish.

'And so you're married they tell me, my dear—and not to Mr. Theo. That don't fare right, somehows. Seein' ye together down the street just now, seemed just the thing.'

Gertrude changed the subject by a swift inquiry after some one's welfare. But they were not to

get rid of it so easily. When they set out to revisit old haunts, the same lamentation was in the mouths of all they met; and a certain homely broadness in the expression of these well-known sentiments embarrassed Theo more than Gertrude. Though she was reproached, he felt to blame, and could not, for the life of him, have told the speakers that he was to be married on the morrow, though he felt that Gertrude was waiting in some amusement for him to do so.

Returning from Darley Wood, their childhood's jungle, they had to pass the vicarage gate. The trees were grown less mighty, the shrubberies had dwindled, the house itself appeared a miniature of that they remembered. There were flower-beds in unfamiliar places.

Theo, with half a mind to go in, laid his hand on the latch.

'Better not,' said Gertrude. 'We should have to talk.'

'Have you said a real good-bye?' she asked, half an hour later, as they retraced the path across the meadows in the deepening light.

'I don't know why we came,' said Theo crossly.

'Because I thought you were in danger of forgetting things that ought to be remembered. And I myself hate to forget.' She paused a moment, looking far into the distance, and then, with rare inconsequence, said vehemently: 'Forget Barford and all we did and thought there! That is yours and mine, and we've buried it to-day together. Don't bore your wife with a

past in which she can feel no interest. It isn't often that I play Sir Oracle.'

Had she wished, for spite, to humble him by revealing in a flash the whole range of his insensate folly, she could not have done it more effectually. But her tone was kinder than it had been all day; wherefore, instead of being infuriated by the shock her words gave him, he was moved to open his heart to her.

'I'm doubtful of myself,' he admitted shamefacedly. 'I don't seem to have thought from the day I set foot in Europe. It has been impossible to think seriously. To-day, looking back, it is all madness. I know you've thought me a fool all along; but I've been pushed by something stronger than my will. It sounds contemptible; I'm afraid you'll think it so.'

It did him good to meet the old frank smile of lips and eyes, and feel her hand on his arm, though he was not blind to the signification of this sudden thaw. Such honour had always been his the minute he owned himself in the wrong; her triumphs were all gracious. He was glad to be sure that what he had taken for sad change in her was but a well-known phase unusually prolonged.

'You won't talk like that to-morrow, or the next day, or the next,' she laughed merrily; 'and you wouldn't do so now, only you've been debarred from her presence for a considerable number of days. Exiles get morbid. What nonsense on the eve of your honeymoon! I meant only to warn you, from my own experi-

ence, against a mistake, the most disastrous that can possibly be made. By admitting anyone into your holy of holies, you bare your heart, and are liable to get hurt in quarrels which would otherwise be trifling. Therefore, I say, keep your past life to yourself, and respect hers as if it were a secret. I don't suppose there ever were two people, bred as strangers, who were the better or the happier for knowing every detail of each other's lives. Why should I think you a fool? The most I have felt is a fear lest you should live to regret the impulse, as I have done. But you won't, I'm sure of it. Put off that gloom at once, or I shall accuse you of acting.'

Her talk on the journey townwards was all of his wedding and delights to come; and Theo, ever dependent on such aid, was able to look forward cheerfully once more.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MATCH BEGINS

Returning to London after Theo's wedding, Gertrude went straight to her new abode. Her aunt, who accompanied her, having no idea but that they were driving to the home she knew, was astonished when their cab pulled up at the foot of high buildings in a strange region. Gertrude, deaf to questions, hurried her into a lighted hall, where the attentions of a sublime porter, and the alarm of passing with his sublimity into a narrow closet, which, on a clang of its trellis-door, flew skyward with them, robbed her of all power to speak. In a dream, when arrived in an upper region, she saw Gertrude insert a key in a door, and next minute found herself in the presence of a grand oak sideboard, her footsteps muffled by a Persian carpet. She heard Gertrude bidding her welcome, explaining the position, asking: 'Isn't it jolly?' but it was the touch of lips on her brow which revived her consciousness, flinging wide the gates of horror.

'You mean to say your husband allows it?'

'You shall judge for yourself. He'll come round after dinner.'

'Well, I shall talk to him straight!'

'You will please do nothing of the kind.'

Gertrude's eyes dilated and flashed so with the prohibition that her aunt was cowed and reduced to hopeless lamentation. Such secret residences and luxurious surprises belonged, in her view of life, to the disreputable.

Her introduction to a bedroom, fresh and simple as a new-blown daisy, and the appearance of Jane, the parlourmaid from St. John's Wood, bringing hot water in a covered can, helped to persuade her that her niece was not quite cut off from religion and virtue. At dinner she went into raptures over the furniture, though still bemoaning the sad occasion of its exhibition; and afterwards, in the drawing-room, with eyes at feast upon divers weighty pieces in rosewood and mahogany, in a light cast down and pleasantly subdued by coloured shades, she gradually forgot misgivings, reverting with enthusiasm to the topic of the wedding. She was enchanted with the bride and the bride's family, especially Mr. Eustace Cumnor, who, seeing her stand alone, had been so polite as to show her the whole house.

Her talk was interrupted by a ring at the door.

'That's Captain Elphinstone, I suppose.'

'Most likely. But I asked Mr. Maurice Cumnor, whose wife is stopping down at Sandset, and Mr. Warne—and Mr Gravesey, too, but he can't come, because his sister's ill.'

'You ought not to have a party all gentlemen.'

'My friends are nearly all men, it happens, somehow.'

Gertrude rose to greet Maurice Cumnor, who,

from a habit of conciliating strangers, left her for Sister Ada on the arrival of a second visitor. Captain Elphinstone appeared unduly excited. He refused to sit down until his wife had shown him every room, and he had satisfied himself of the perfection of all the arrangements. Coming back from this round of inspection, Gertrude found James Warne in the drawing-room. He stood ill at ease and inclined to scowl, while Maurice and Sister Ada chatted amicably. For Warne, a militant agnostic, the presence of a nun was like a corpse in the room; and the great silver cross that kept gleaming on the bosom of the nun's robe affected him as it affects the Devil. Mr. Cumnor he disliked on more personal grounds.

Gertrude read the situation at a glance, and drew him into the group with her and Harry. He possessed her respect and entire confidence, had been her friend for years, and she was ashamed to own how small was her affection for him compared with that she already felt for Maurice Cumnor. There was something hard and rasping about Warne, the outcome of progressive disillusionment. He seemed to say, 'Here I am; make the best of me!' with repellent looks, leaving all the work to his interlocutor. Nowhere, outside a newspaper office, could he have been counted an acquisition. It was ridiculous for such a man, even in imagination, to compete with Maurice Cumnor, who provided, as well as partook of, the pleasures of friendship. Warne had spent the previous night as Theo's

guest at Bedford, and no doubt the latter had been foolish enough to harp on his own distrust of Mr. Cumnor.

Thanks to his ill-humour, conversation between them showed a tendency to languish. Captain Elphinstone, having inspected the flat for the fifth time that evening, went to sleep in a chair before the fire. Though persevering in her efforts to thaw James Warne, she was not engrossed by them, but had an ear for the sayings of her aunt and Mr. Cumnor. The pair were on Church services, comparing likes and dislikes; and Maurice appeared to be in devotional ecstasies. She herself had never sounded him on the subject, hiding her religious thoughts as instinctively as she hid her bosom, but she had heard his wife deplore his unbelief.

'And does your niece agree with us?' she heard him ask, and her aunt make answer:

'Of course. She's a very good Churchwoman.'

She was amused, but at the same time vexed, till, looking round, she met the glare of his eyeglass raised in triumph, as if he counted on her having heard.

'You are all things to all men,' she threw to him over her shoulder.

That aside was the last straw to Warne's irritation. The talk of the other two had reached his ears as well as Gertrude's. Himself disgusted with the man's hypocrisy, he was shocked to see his hostess laugh at it.

He rose and took leave curtly, when, remembering with a pang that he was Theo's friend,

Gertrude accompanied him as far as to the lift, but could win no smile from him. Her aunt was right, she supposed. It had been a mistake to invite so many men. The difficulties of her position suddenly appeared overwhelming.

Maurice took Harry's arm, vowing, in the way of good-fellowship, to escort him home.

When they were gone, she flung herself down in the chair which Harry had vacated, while her aunt drew aside the window-curtains and looked out.

'I wouldn't live up here alone for anything! It makes me giddy to look down. Just suppose there was a fire!' Quitting the window, she pursued: 'I wouldn't ask that Mr. Warne again, if I were you. Mr. Cumnor tells me he's a downright atheist; and he was one of those who led poor Theo into trouble with his socialism. Now, Mr. Cumnor is a man I like. They seem a nice family. He has eased my mind wonderfully.'

'How?'

'By assuring me you will have the support of a number of ladies—his wife among them (though she did make me think of Jezebel at the church to-day, poor thing!). And there'll be Theo's wife, of course, when once they get back from the honeymoon.'

The 'of course' rang derisive in Gertrude's ears. She, in her turn, went to the window. Impatiently pulling back the curtains, she flung up the sash, when voices of the town poured in with a note of satiety, of utter weariness. Leaning forth, she could see some stars overhead,

among snail-like clouds, while beneath all was confused, a lurid mist which rumbled, muttered, gave forth heartless cries. She should have managed to be alone this first night; the inroad of men and her aunt's solicitude had made it vulgar.

Next morning, having risen early for her aunt's departure, she repaired to St. John's Wood, and, surprising her husband at his lonely breakfast, scattered his desolation to the winds. She took her usual place at his table, and invited him to dine with her that evening.

In the course of a few days, receiving visits from Mrs. Maurice Cumnor, Lady Pettigrew, and Miss Oldfield, Gertrude began to feel less outcast.

Maurice initiated a practice of calling on her daily in his way from chambers. Intrepid, she was aware that he admired her, knew that he begged but encouragement to make love to her, yet saw no harm in this kind of tentative courtship where the word was hers, conceiving the finest friendship of a man for a woman to be but incipient passion grasped at the shapeless stage by the woman, and by her fashioned to her taste and need. She took care, notwithstanding, to keep their talks impersonal, and, did he attempt to open his heart to her, would snub him mercilessly. On one occasion, when he thought fit to confide to her that he was a born coward, quoting examples from his past experience of the panic which spontaneously seized him in the neighbourhood of death, or bloodshed, or infec-

tious disease, she refused to listen, saying he was morbid and reminded her of Harry at his worst.

'Your sister must be settled by this time. I must call,' she observed, for change of subject.

'Take my advice, and wait till she signifies her readiness, unless you're much braver than I am. Bella is asking you and your husband to a grand pow-wow in the bride's honour. You'll see Olive there—and the Prophet.'

He had nicknamed Theo 'the Prophet,' pretending that she thought him inspired.

'I still think Theo might have been to see me.'

'Happiness is a state of oblivion.'

On the point of laughing to scorn the bare idea that Theo could forget her, Gertrude checked herself, having no wish to confide in Mr. Cumnor.

'Does your wife know you come here every day?' she asked with malice, as he rose to go.

'Yes, and approves of my coming,' he answered, giving tone for tone.

She heard on all hands that his wife was jealous, and wondered with what tale he had beguiled her.

Most of her mornings were spent at Harry's house in provision for his comfort; and now she dined with him, now he with her. Alive to the flattery of an affection that increased instead of diminishing when freed from safeguards, he came to take pride in his position of a privileged friend.

'What has become of Theo?' she happened to think aloud, when Harry was with her late one afternoon.

'Oh, that reminds me!' Her husband fumbled in his pockets. 'He looked in the other evening on his way from business. I made a note at the time. Ah, here it is! "Thursday, 5.30." He seemed astonished not to find you, had forgotten all about this flat. I gave him the address, and he went off in a tearing hurry.'

It was dark in the room, save for the dance of firelight, which in time grew tedious, like a nigger's grin. Gertrude rang the bell for Jane to light the gas and draw the curtains. At the same instant another bell rang, and the maid went to open the front-door.

'Why, here he is!' cried Harry, struck by the coincidence.

The sudden leap to light as the maid put a match to a gas-jet near the door gave to Theo's entrance a dramatic effect which disconcerted him.

'How odd, when we were talking about you!'

'Can't stop a minute,' said the visitor, intent on Gertrude. 'Why have you never been near us, nor so much as written? Olive feels quite hurt.'

'I didn't like to call until I heard from her she was prepared. I'll write this very minute and explain.'

'Don't say I told you!'

'Am I so indiscreet?'

Gertrude composed her note at a side-table, while her husband essayed to rally Theo on his wedded bliss, with the condescension of one himself on purer heights.

'Here you are,' said Gertrude, presenting the letter.

'I shall post it, mind,' said Theo awkwardly as he hurried out; 'I don't want her to guess I had to prompt you. By the way, I've got a letter here for you from Tessier. Catch! It came enclosed in one to me. He always remembers your birthday, from that time in Paris. Do you know I've had a present from Mrs. Ettrick Jones? —though we quite forgot to ask her to the wedding. I'll tell you all the news to-morrow night at Maurice Cumnor's.'

But at Maurice Cumnor's Gertrude had no chance to talk to Theo. The rooms were full to overflowing, and he with Olive was in great request. His eyes expressed despair on meeting hers; no sooner had he got rid of one incubus than another pounced on him. And it seemed equally impossible to get a word with Olive.

Gertrude was exchanging views upon the temperature with a dame unknown, when Bella approached her, beckoning, and whispered:

'My dear, I'm so thankful to you about Maurice. He came to church last Sunday morning, and behaved beautifully. I owe it all to you.'

So this was the story Maurice told his wife! Ere Gertrude could realize the full extent of his perfidy, Bella was engrossed by other guests. She looked around for Maurice, meaning to give it him; but he was not in sight, and her wrath evaporated in amusement. Coming suddenly upon Olive, she seized the opportunity to apologize for her neglect of duty.

The great dark eyes stared vaguely at her, then lighted as with sudden recollection.

'Oh yes, I remember now you mention it. Please don't give it another thought. To tell the truth, I hardly noticed the omission, we've had such heaps of callers.'

The bride's determined graciousness shut the door in Gertrude's face.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OLIVIA FEELS HER GROUND

OLIVE had resolved to keep Mrs. Elphinstone at a distance, from no personal dislike, but because that woman stood for the embodiment of all which disappointed her in Theo.

After the first six weeks his passion burned in reason, while hers was just beginning to recover from the swoon of great surprises. It was then, when she required his utmost tenderness, that he must choose to frown preoccupied, and wonder why Gertrude had not been to see them. She warned him archly that she was not going to play second fiddle to his Gertrude, when, instead of fondling her to dispel the foolish notion, he took the tone of remonstrance. It was the occasion of their first quarrel, which changed the bride's apprehensions of rivalry from three parts fun to earnest. For this she grieved, bearing no ill-will to the woman, and forced to admit in secret that she was herself to blame. She even wept repentant tears upon the breast of Emily, who, however, indignantly absolved her.

'Young gentlemen are that thoughtless, that

unreasonable! Though you did marry him for love, 'taint to be expected as you'll hob-and-nob with all his friends. No, indeed! Not likely! Brought up as you've been, so nice, and always accustomed to the best o' company. And a woman "put away," as you may say, by her husband—the idea! What would the Squire and Madam think? let alone Mr. Eustace, and Mr. Jack too!'

Emily, though the servant of the Moores, drew her wages still from Sandset; this easement, and a sum of fifty pounds a year, being all the allowance Olive got from home. Charged by the family to take great care of Olive, she posed as guardian of the young couple, without suspecting that she caused them merriment. Mr. Moore, by his marriage, had become of the family; but he had not been born in the purple, he sprang from the mire. It was ridiculous to ask his wife, a perfect lady, to be hand-in-glove with all his old associates.

It was Emily who opened the door to Mrs. Elphinstone when that lady called at last. Olivia, as it chanced, was out. The old servant's inextinguishable faith in the commonness of Mr. Moore's family appeared in the report to her mistress

'Furs, ma'am, such as you yourself might ha' worn, and a beautiful hat, and a lady-like way with her. She asked to be allowed to see the house, being as she'd chose it for her cousin, so I let her peep in the dinin'-room.'

That Gertrude had chosen this place of resi-

dence—a vertical slice, two windows thick, in a three-storied, basemented terrace at Kensington —sufficed to put Olive out of love with it. The very name of Gertrude was fast becoming her obsession. Bella, who drove round on fine afternoons to take her out to pay calls or view the fashions in the Park, had that name more often than any other on her carmined lips—for once encouraging her husband's flame. She seemed satisfied that Mrs. Elphinstone was guiding Maurice towards that simple faith in which she (Bella) graced her rented pew and, by the aid of cushions, a commodious hassock, a maid, a lorgnette, and a choice of smelling-bottles, bore Divine service once a Sunday; and it would have been cruel to disillusion her. Lady Pettigrew, too, a believer in the sovereign rights of women —'some women,' she subjoined, to snub poor Olive, who impugned her theory—extolled the tact displayed by Mrs. Elphinstone in the subordination of a very tiresome husband.

Olive came to hate a name thus vaunted, and, obliged to return Gertrude's visit, expected to maintain politeness only by mighty efforts. She went for ten minutes, but remained two hours, disarmed and enchanted by the manner of her reception. Gertrude was alone, and blessed the chance. She took her visitor in her arms, and made her sit beside her, crying:

'At last I've got you!'

The room was cosy, full of welcome, and the visitor forgot polite intentions, prejudices, even

Theo, in a sudden gladness of immense relief. She was conscious of a new emotion, like man's love but rarer, in the arms of this rival woman, whose eyes wooed her. Her heart had been in bonds which now were loosed.

'You must come and see me often,' said Gertrude, when at length she moved to go.

But the door opening for Olivia's egress discovered Maurice out upon the landing, who entered as of right. And when she reached home it was to find that Jack, who was up on a visit to the Maurice Cumnors, had called in her absence and been prevailed upon by Emily to stay to dinner. On learning where she had been, he asked: 'Was Maurice there?' and, receiving her answer in the affirmative, covered his mouth with his hand. 'I wouldn't be too thick with that woman, if I were you,' he said.

Late that evening, when Jack was gone and Theo asked for details of her talk with Gertrude, she took a tone to vex him, harping with pointed delicacy on the frequency of Maurice at the flat, and proclaiming it a thousand pities with the sigh reserved for things past praying for. The command to shut up made her stare in innocent wonder at her husband.

'Mayn't I say what I think—to you?'

'You don't think it.'

'It's what people say.'

'People sometimes lie.'

'Well, perhaps I don't really think it.' Olive clasped one of her knees, and gazed narrowly at the fire, as if the true colour of her thoughts

were there depicted. 'But I do think she should be more careful.'

'I don't suppose the thought occurred to her. She hasn't studied impropriety.'

'Now you're getting clever. I can't hope to follow.'

'Don't be idiotic!'

Even when, fatigued at length, she wept upon his shoulder, he did not give way. She loved to feel such strength opposed to her; it secured her at her mischief like the bars of a nursery-window. But the warring of this new respect with her old love for him, which still clung to its first conception of a subject lover, produced an inequality of temper, desperate sallies to surprise his judgment and forlorn hopes to overthrow it, disgusting to herself in quiet moments.

Nor was it only on the ground of Gertrude that their opinions clashed. His views upon a score of subjects shocked her. One day he sought her leave to ask a friend to dinner—a man named Whitley, head cashier at the office, whose kindness had helped him out of divers muddles. She professed delight in the prospect of becoming acquainted with a man he liked.

'He's not aristocratic, I must warn you,' said Theo.

She did not expect him to be that.

Charmed for once to feel herself in accord with Theo, she devised a choice little dinner, and herself adorned the table with flowers and smilax.

'You needn't have gone to all that trouble,' said Theo, admitted to view the arrangements.

She was dilating on her wish to do honour to his friend, when a knock and ring at the door checked her finishing touches, and she fled upstairs. From the drawing-room she was dismayed to hear a twanging Cockney voice unduly lifted. A minute later Theo introduced 'Mr. Whitley,' when a smug and affably radiant individual grasped her hand with 'How are *you*, Mrs. Moore? Heard a lot about you from my young friend, but never had the pleasure before.' Whereupon the monster wrung his hands like a shopman. Amid her battle to maintain a gracious smile, Olivia glanced drawn swords at Theo, who, mistaking the import of the flash, nodded intelligence and slipped out of the room. He had omitted to fetch up wine from the cellar.

Emily, who waited on their needs at dinner, was rigid in her orbit, and had a gorgonized stare. Her mistress chattered and laughed unnaturally.

Mr. Whitley had come up from Penge, where he owned a 'little place' of which he vaunted the convenience. He had been doing a bit in the garden (it was Saturday), and was just having a good-night romp with the kiddies, when Mother told him it was time to dress. Admiration was begged for the flower (a rose-camellia) in his buttonhole, as the produce of his own conservatory. If Mrs. Moore would give them the pleasure, any Sunday, he would like to show her round his little place.

'How dare you?' Olive demanded, when the coast was clear at last.

'Why, whatever's up?'

'How dare you bring that vulgar, talking man here?'

'Poor fellow, he was excited and a bit nervous. He was immensely proud to meet you; he's looked up all about your family, knows a lot more about it than I do. I never thought you'd object; Gertrude didn't. And you've won his heart completely. I never saw a man more pleased. He'll talk of this at Penge for weeks to come.'

'Among his kind! I won't have Gertrude quoted. How you deceived me by saying he was a friend!'

From that day forward she abhorred a business which put him on an equality with men like Whitley. She imagined echoes of Whitley in her husband's talk, and feared that he would quite discard the manners of a gentleman. But those were secret fears. To his face, she pleaded: 'Do give up the business! You don't know how time drags while you're away. And then you come home tired; you're not yourself. It's only two hundred a year, and——'

'If I had another two hundred a year of private income, I might think of it. But as things are, it's impossible.'

'You'll come in for more than that when your aunt dies!'

'I had rather not speculate on that contingency.'

'By the way, that reminds me'—she branched from the subject—'I've asked your aunt to come and stay with us, just to show you that I'm not a snob.'

Theo wished that the ex-housekeeper could have been invited in some other capacity than as a touchstone of good breeding, and that he could have been informed of the invitation in a context less suggestive of intent to kill. Her visit gave him pleasure, however, and so long as she remained in the house, there was a truce to irritation. A young wife was an object of devotion for Sister Ada. In her veneration for the hope of increase she knelt with Emily before Olivia; and the maid sang her praises loudly, therefore; it was the posture required of Mr. Moore's relations.

Despite her cheerfulness, and the lively interest she took in everything, Theo perceived a grievous change in his aunt. When out walking with Olive, she had often to stop for breath; and at saying good-bye she betrayed great emotion, as if aware that it might be for ever.

Accordingly, he was scarce surprised when, one evening, as they rose from dinner, Emily presented a note which, she said, had just been brought by Mrs. Elphinstone's maid in a hansom.

'My aunt was taken ill yesterday; to-day is much worse. The people at the Home have wired to Gertrude. She asks me to be at Victoria at nine o'clock.'

'How senseless to wait for you, when it's a matter of life and death!' Olive exclaimed; unable, even at such a moment, to forgo her hit at Gertrude.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## OLIVIA SCORES A POINT

Theo, on the transverse platform at Victoria Station, looked in vain for Gertrude, till a woman, whose identity he had already balanced and rejected, approached him with a thankful exclamation. Otherwise, he would never have known her, she was so closely veiled.

'I'm so glad you've come, though I hardly expected you.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, you've married a wife!'

'Olive's all right when anything real's the matter.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

It was the first time he had known Gertrude unfair or bitter in her judgment of anybody, and he thought fit to rebuke her. For reply, she pushed up her veil just far enough to let him see that she was crying, then dragged it down again and turned impatiently.

'I feared you would not be allowed to come with me. It seems less of a break-up now you are here. I thought you might put off coming till the morning, when it will be too late.'

'Is it so bad as all that?'

She nodded without speaking, and handed him her purse to get the tickets.

By the time they were seated in the train, she had recovered composure and a steady voice; and she did not break down again, even when they arrived too late and were led into the presence of death.

It was long past midnight when they left the Orphanage, and both were too restless with the surge of memories, comparable to the moil of waters where a ship has sunk, to think of sleep. So they walked down through deserted streets to the sea-front, where, in the noise and smell of the waves, they walked up and down comparing memories. And they were still pacing to and fro, unconscious of the least fatigue, when the sea turned violet to the dawn.

'You must go home at once, by the first train,' said Gertrude positively.

'Let me stay at least till this evening, to look after you.'

'Do I require looking after? I stay here till the funeral; you'll come down for that. You've got your work and Olive. Would it please her to learn that I had to drive you? You'll be back for breakfast.'

She walked with him up to the station, and saw him off.

At entering his own house he was met in the hall by Emily, who, in a hushed voice, asked for news. Learning that the worst had befallen, the handmaid snuffled, producing a handkerchief, and looked scandalized to see him bound upstairs,

two steps at a time. Olive was still in bed. She raised herself on an elbow as he entered, and, seeing who it was, gave a glad cry. He sat beside her on the bed, and told the news, hearing which, she sobbed in his arms a little, then exclaimed:

'Well, there's one thing. Now you needn't go to business. You know what you always said—if we had another two hundred a year! We shall have that now.'

'I only said that to get peace. I'm going to work to-day as usual, and have no intention of giving up. Before either Gertrude or I get that extra money there will be months of formalities.'

'Oh, and I suppose you mean to spend all your spare time with her! I see little enough of you as it is. But that, on the top of your work, is too much!'

'Do be nice to Gertrude now—to please me!'

'*Now?* I like that. As if I had been nasty! I shall certainly make no difference.'

It was the impotence of her small arms to include all her husband's hopes and fears, delights and interests, and make them hers alone, that maddened Olive. He thought her jealous of another woman, but she was jealous of him, him only, and felt defrauded in every thought and word which he bestowed away from her. Gertrude! Why need Gertrude come between them? It was all his doing. He would take her fantastic sorties literally, repel them seriously, and scold and argue till her head ached. As for his work, she did honestly regard

it as degrading, having seen Mr. Whitley; and Maurice was always taunting her with it, asking how things went in the city, mentioning fluctuations of the money-market, as if these must interest her. She did often wish that Theo could find something nicer to do. But when one fine evening in June Theo came home late, and, without hearing her reproaches, took her in his arms and said, 'I've given notice,' she turned a dead weight in his arms, and wept uncontrollably in utter misery.

'Oh, don't give it up! Not for me! Say it's not for me. I couldn't bear it! Oh, why was I ever born? I've spoilt your life.'

So entirely had she trusted to his strength of will that her victory appeared a great disaster. A child, accustomed to slap a wall with wooden spade, would feel the same dismay if it fell down before him. She had destroyed something loved and revered, upon which she had come to lean, and knew not what to cling to, where to turn.

'They'll think it's you; they'll blame you,' she sobbed, 'when it's me—all me! Oh, what will they think of me! Does Gertrude know?'

'Yes. I went to Mr. Gravesey and to her at once, since they got me the berth. That's why I'm late.'

'What did she say?'

'Nothing whatever. Your brother, who was there, remarked that it seemed a pity.'

'I don't want to hear what Maurice said. Did you state your reasons?'

'No, since she was not alone!'

'If she had been alone you'd have told her everything, poor persecuted lamb! And she made no remark. How kind of her to spare you her opinion of me! You're always flying to her. You love her better than you love me. Why don't you take her and have done with it?'

It was a bitter, wounded cry, but he heard it not as such. Coldly, from the height of reason, he expounded its stupidity. How could such words touch her, astray in the darkened valleys. She hated his reason as her enemy, the rock that kept from her the sun, his love. She knew the love was there, but could not feel its warmth for reason in the way. Beneath that icy blast of kind, calm words, she gave way completely and became hysterical. In that state she was lying on the sofa, her husband leaning over her intent to soothe, when Emily announced:

'Mr. Jack, ma'am.'

Olive sprang up, and, with face averted, bade her brother welcome. Theo shook Jack effusively by the hand. Both had quite forgotten that he was to come that evening.

Touched by Theo's manifest joy at sight of him, Jack said:

'How are you, old man?' and was going on to kiss his sister, when, with handkerchief hiding her face, she fled from the room.

'What's up? Blowed if she wasn't crying!'

Jack gaped all round for an explanation ere his eyes fixed inquiry upon Theo.

'I've upset her,' owned the latter ruefully. 'It's because I've given notice to quit my present

work; it's what she's been urging on me ever since we married; and now it's done she is wretched, as you see.'

'Nerves, you may bet,' said Jack doctorially. 'By the by, will you mind my going out after dinner? I met a man from our part of the world just now as I came along, and he asked me to join him this evening. It's months since I went to a music-hall, and a fling does one good occasionally. I shouldn't have suggested it if Olive had been herself. But, as it is, naturally you'd rather be alone.'

But when, at dinner, Jack mentioned his design to 'go somewhere and see something' (thus he phrased it), Olive insisted that Theo must go too; he had had no gaiety since his marriage; it would do him good, and so on.

'Delighted!' said Jack, regarding Theo with raised eyebrows. 'Do come! I didn't like to ask you, as a married man. You'll meet little Farrer, a great chum of mine and Eustace's, and brother to the one you knew out in Turkey. I was afraid the missus might disapprove.'

'Oh, I'm not jealous. I'd trust Theo anywhere,' said Olive sweetly. 'He deserves something nice for throwing up that business.'

'So he does, by George! Don't know how you could stand it as long as you did, Theo. Eustace and I used to bar you, as you know, but we never, at the worst, thought you were the kind of man for an office-stool—not while there was a sky above! You do deserve something, by Jingo, and we'll make a night of it.'

It pleased Olive to have it clearly seen that she was not a jealous wife; and it seemed necessary that Theo should accept something at her hands.

Jack sang her praises loudly when, out of doors, he linked his arm in Theo's.

'Now, that's a sensible woman! Jolly decent of her, I call it. And, by Jove, you're devilish lucky. Fellows I know daren't call their souls their own. I always fancied she'd be jealous; but she's not, that's clear as daylight. She's the brightest of us all, bar Maurice, and Maurice isn't like a Cumnor. It's from her mother she gets that—damned intelligent woman, the mater—reads things no one can understand.

'I say, it's lucky I'm staying with you, not Maurice. No larks from that house. Lock-up at eleven, and anyone not in then stops out, and there's a hell of a row. The servants there are a police. Bella, dear old soul, is a prude in some ways. She looks sharp after Maurice. And she's got the money, so he can't complain. Lord, how we've laughed, Eustace and I, about it! But, as I say, you're in quite another boat; you're uncommon lucky.'

Jack, mellowed by dinner, and expansive from his full allowance of a generous wine, showed the nakedness of his understanding with pride. He produced sundry truisms, which he called his ideas concerning love and life, the desirability of marriage, and the latitude allowed to single men through pity for the hardness of their lot.

'A man like me must burst out sometimes. Why, even old Eustace does occasionally. It 'd

be wrong for you, of course—a regular sin—but with us it's different. You know what I mean. You've been through the mill.'

Theo, through indifference, assented to every proposition set before him. He was told that the moralist was himself mad in love.

'Moore, I honour that girl as I would an angel. I won't mention names. You know her.'

The allusion being, of course, to Mary Oldfield, Theo very readily assented, and Jack went on to aver that, despite his pure devotion to a girl like that—a saint, a seraph—and the conviction of his own perfect beastliness, a man must have his fling occasionally.

'Do you blame me?' he asked, stopping short at a lamp-post to buttonhole Theo, and peer earnestly into his face.

Theo assured him that he blamed no man—let each trim his own small lamp, not criticize his neighbour's.

'Just what I say myself,' resumed Jack solemnly. 'Men are differently made; there's no hard-and-fast rule.'

Theo caught himself longing for the taciturnity of Eustace with the desire of green shade. At the music-hall Jack did not even go through the form of looking for little Farrer, explaining that his rendezvous with that dashing young blood was fiction. 'You can't call it lying, because there really is such a person. It's just an excuse, I call it. Old Eustace calls it lying, but he's devilish hard in some ways.'

Theo stayed but an hour for politeness, and

then, handing a latchkey to Jack, went out again into the street. Olive had made such a point of his enjoying himself that he feared to disappoint her by too prompt a return, so sauntered home on foot, choosing the quieter ways.

His gaze played with trifles—the leap-frog of men's shadows as they passed a lamp, lights down the length of a street all strung together like an amber rosary, the banishment of the outshone sky above, of which no creature but himself seemed cognizant—while his thoughts ran musing on the oddness of his predicament. A man under thirty, he had resigned a good post, with the prospect of advancement, solely to please his wife; and in so doing had hurt or offended her—perhaps both. In the whole circle of his horizon appeared but one thing steadfast, and that was the affection of his cousin Gertrude. And now he had disgusted Gertrude by giving way to Olive on a point so vital.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

If Gertrude deplored Theo's weakness in throwing up an employment she had been at pains to obtain for him, she was furious with Olive, who had goaded him to commit the folly. Some effort to advance, to develop, and improve the natural talents, was a condition of her regard for man or woman, which she had always striven to foster in those near to her. This it was which had first attracted her to Harry, a creature struggling and in need of help, and still made her patient of his many foibles. This, too, lay at the root of her liking for Maurice Cumnor, a man of vast possibilities, and ambitious, as her instinct told her. Backsliding in a friend was wine to her, she so exulted in the counter-effort, but in the presence of sheer apathy she drooped and stifled, as live things languish in a tropic calm. And Theo now met her remonstrances with that shrug and smile of the fatalist which she had learnt to associate with his evil genius.

Her intimacy with the Maurice Cumnors, the Oldfields, and others, obliged her to join in discussion of the subject, and her real feelings could not be hid. The news had fallen amid the

Cumnor circle like a rock in a pool. Waves of discussion rose and slapped one another, and it seemed as if so great a storm in so small a basin could never find room to subside. Maurice—and, in a milder degree, his Bella—blamed Theo for yielding to his wife's silly whim ; and Jack unwittingly supported their contention by boasting Olive's part in the event, the while he strove to range himself with the Sandset Manor party, who applauded Moore's decision but pooh-poohed the bare idea of Olive's instrumentality.

The wife herself, in Gertrude's presence, disowned all responsibility.

'It was entirely his own doing. I implored him not to, but he would. I do so hope it may turn out for the best. . . . At any rate, it will be nice to have him at home in the daytime.'

That was at tea one summer afternoon in Bella's drawing-room. Gertrude could not refrain from searching out the speaker's eyes with the whisper: 'How can you tell such stories !'

Olive coloured up to the roots of her hair ; while Bella, unaware of any clouds, burst forth in praise of a nice new curate—so young, and yet so truly pious, it seemed quite a miracle—thus averting an open rupture between her visitors. But Gertrude felt that she had made a mortal foe of Olive, and was grieved when, alone in her eyrie, she reviewed the incident. She made haste to obtain from Theo a solemn promise to let nothing that his wife could say impair their lifelong friendship.

'No fear of that!' he cried. 'I'm always fighting her unreasonable dislike of you. My deciding to leave off work was intended as a sop to her, to try and stop her raving against you, though my own inclination chimed in helpfully; I've got heartily sick of routine, and want a holiday.'

Her practical woman's mind, whose loftiest dreams were expressed in homely acts and common duties, failed to understand his alleged motives in sacrificing his work, but she was glad in his assurance that no power on earth could ever alienate him from her, and wrung from him a further promise to take up some study, and not to idle every hour of every day.

Theo told her it was arranged that he and Olive were to go to Sandset Manor for the whole of July, August, and September. He would rather, he declared, have spent three months in Hades. The atmosphere of manorial rights and hidebound, dull tradition was miasma to him. But Olive scouted his suggestion of farm-house lodgings somewhere in the neighbourhood, where they could enjoy more freedom.

In the parched July days, when the multitude of grimed housetops visible from her windows drowsed in beery haze, Gertrude envied Theo in green country. She fell a prey to sudden longings—for woods, or mountains, or some sea-cliff wet with spray, and even so far forgot the rigour of her pact with Harry as to suggest that he should take her to North Wales, or the Cornish Coast. But he refused, declaring that it would tantalize him, and revive dissatisfaction with a settle-

ment to which he had grown quite reconciled; and she shrank from going alone.

She had reason, other than sentimental, to desire a holiday in her anxiety to escape for a while from the assiduities of Maurice Cumnor, which began to embarrass her. Maurice was making himself indispensable, and slowly but surely extracting her full confidence. And this he did, not unconsciously as Theo or another might have done, but deliberately and with exultant effort, which made it horrible. By the fiction he kept up before his wife, to which, through fear to cause wide mischief, she (Gertrude) dare not give the lie direct, he had gained an unfair advantage, which he used to the utmost. Bella encouraged his visits to the flat; and Gertrude, divided against herself between indignation, amusement, and the pleasure she felt in seeing him, had no strength to repel him.

One Sunday, when she was ready to start for church, he turned up unexpectedly, and announced his intention to join her that morning in worship.

'Then I shall stop at home,' she declared; whereupon he bowed, with 'Thanks, I should prefer that.'

In the end she went to church, and he beside her. She took no notice of him, and knelt in fear lest he should misbehave himself; but he preserved the demeanour of some gentle prelate, and, taking a Prayer-Book from his pocket, seemed absorbed in the service. He sat, knelt, and stood at the proper times, joined in the hymns, and bore his part in the responses (as

he himself afterwards put it) 'with the best of them.'

He was shorter than she was by an inch or two, and the look of his head, singing 'Jerusalem the Golden,' chin in air, with every symptom of devotional fervour, touched in her the spring of inconsequent laughter. Her shoulders shook so that she was sure every one must be staring. She put her handkerchief to her mouth, feigned to cough, tried to focus her mind upon details of the surrounding architecture—all in vain. That imp of drollery still kept dancing in her brain; till at length, in despair of recovery, and ashamed of such irreverence, she pushed past him and went out of church. Maurice followed her in grave solicitude.

Clear of the porch, with the roll of the organ muted in her ears, and confronted with the Sabbath syncope of life in the grey street, her mirth was left behind as a part of the service, and indignation took its place.

'It's beyond a joke,' she, choking, exclaimed; whereat he pretended innocence, obliging her to formulate the charge against him, when he shrugged his shoulders with: 'Admire your charity! How do you know it's all hypocrisy on my part? I behaved myself this morning; you did not.'

Convinced of the vanity of all attempts to put him down, she sought revenge in the intimacy of his wife, whom she strove to disillusion, but without success. On her protestation that she was anything but saintly, that she never

talked to Maurice of religion, Bella bestowed a smile.

'Ah, that's so sweet of you! But you can't deceive me, love, for I see the change myself, and Maurice tells me. So sorry to hear you felt faint in church last Sunday. (My dear, I never go without a smelling-bottle; no one should, I'm sure.) It seems to have been a most beautiful service. I should like to accompany you myself next Sunday morning, if you won't think it very wrong to go in a carriage.'

Gertrude welcomed a proposal promising to relieve her of the charge of Maurice. She went, however, to a different church, where the custom of separating the sheep from such wolves prevailed. Bella, following Gertrude, squeezed her way between the knees of seated women and the backs of the row of chairs in front of them, while Maurice spread himself out comfortably in the men's preserve of empty seats across the aisle. She fidgeted and moaned throughout the service, remaining seated, and often proffered her smelling-bottle to Gertrude, whom she imagined likewise at the last gasp. Sniffing hard at her vinaigrette, she seemed to survey the scene with pious horror, while the ambient air waxed faint with costly perfumes.

'Well, never again will I say or hear a word against the ritualists!' she exclaimed, when they got out at last, breathing deep of release. 'I only wish I were half so good. Those horrid little hard chairs, and nothing to be called a hassock, and people kneeling actually on the floor, some of

them quite poor people; I so longed to give to them. And the sermon, making me cry all the time! It was all too moving. Never again could I go through it; but I'm glad to have been this once, and thank you, love, for taking me. I shall be the better and the humbler for it all my life.'

The religious revival, invented as a joke by Maurice, had, in Bella, its one enthusiast. Hardly a day elapsed without her writing to Gertrude on account of doubts or heart-searchings, or calling her to consult upon some project of good works. In dismay at the responsibility thus thrust upon her, Gertrude urged her to consult her parish clergy, which she did, but still clung to Gertrude as a higher conscience. The clergy laid before her schemes of charity, funds for the relief of this and that parochial need; and she subscribed liberally, but remained dissatisfied.

'I want to do something for somebody real, who can talk to me and say thank you. Subscriptions, no doubt, do good, but not to me.'

Gertrude saw what she was trying to express, and quite agreed with her. It pleased her to observe the perplexity of Maurice, and his disgust with these doings; and when, as the outcome of her newborn sense of duty, Bella announced her unchangeable intention to stay in town with her husband through the Long Vacation, Gertrude triumphed openly, seeing the miner hoist with his own petard.

She could see that he was not only vexed, but miserable. He complained of her cruelty, when alone with her, in a tone of real grievance she had

deemed foreign to his voice. He was sick of the game he had himself started, and even threatened to make a clean breast of his deceit to Bella ; but upon Gertrude saying, 'How I wish you would!' he cried, 'I shan't, then!' like a naughty child. By way of appropriate vengeance he devoted himself to her husband, trying to rouse a manly spirit in Captain Elphinstone to throw off her yoke; but Harry was stanch, and reported everything, so the perfidy recoiled on his own head.

## CHAPTER XX

### GERTRUDE'S WILL PREVAILS

'My dear,' said Bella one August afternoon, when Gertrude called in response to an urgent message, 'I've heard of the saddest case—five little children, and the mother not yet twenty-three, widowed last week. I'm going to see them, if you'll come with me. The carriage will be here directly.'

Tears overflowed her eyes, and in the carriage she grasped Gertrude's hand with both of hers and squeezed it tight. There were frequent stoppings for the coachman to inquire his way; but at length they arrived at a point beyond which the carriage could not go, and were forced to proceed on foot. Bella, deeply moved, clutched Gertrude's arm; the splendid footman followed with a hamper. They passed between iron posts into a long paved alley, walled by high houses, veritable hives of wretchedness. Women of bloated appearance stood in the doorways, gossiping with arms akimbo, or leaned forth from upper windows with their hair in curling-papers. Dirty infants crawled on every flight of steps. Shouts at the pitch of raucous voices, and the ceaseless wail of children, filled the air

with a volume of sound inhuman, which increased on the appearance of the ladies, insults being showered upon the flunkey, who kept close to his mistress.

They had not made many steps in this infernal region before they were surrounded by a crowd of screaming urchins, at sight of whose rags and impish faces Bella wept anew and pulled out her purse. Gertrude snatched it out of her hand, and held it safe. The little crowd, increasing rapidly, grew more obstreperous with every moment. They ran some risk of being mobbed. Gertrude and the footman between them prevailed on Mrs. Cumnor to turn back.

'But I must give these poor children something,' she cried distractedly. 'Gertrude, you've got my purse; throw all the money! How cruel you are! Well, there's the hamper. Henry, put down the hamper. Here, you poor little things, here's something for you—lots of good things! I hope you'll like them.'

She was with difficulty prevented from attempting a fair division of the contents among the swarm of ragamuffins, who straightway fell upon the hamper, and fought and scrimmaged over it with fierce cries.

'Oh dear, I never should have believed unless I'd seen it!' gasped Bella, when they were back in the carriage. 'I shall dream of this for months to come. It makes it wicked to be comfortable, only to see such people. Poor things! Poor things!'

A visit from the curate, whose sad tale had set

her off upon that luckless quest, occurring while she was yet in exclamation, she poured the story into his astonished ears. The good man was aghast.

'But, my dear lady, I never dreamt that you would attempt to go there, or I should not have told you of the case! I am thankful to know that you did not enter a house, for I hear there is smallpox in those slums.'

The effect of this on Bella was electrical. Quaking in every limb, she rang the bell, and ordered a bath to be prepared immediately.

'Mr. Wigan, you should have mentioned this before,' she said, in a trembling voice. 'Please go now; I must change every rag, and so must you, love! I insist upon it. These things must be burnt.'

When Maurice entered towards six o'clock he was surprised to find Gertrude, in rich attire not made for her, striving to inspirit his wife, who appeared inconsolable. Curiously, Bella appropriated all the danger to herself, saying:

'Keep away from me, my love! I wouldn't have you catch it for worlds. . . . Don't touch me, sweet, or I shall never forgive myself. . . . Maurice, don't come near me! I've been where there's smallpox.'

Gertrude explained the state of affairs coherently, ridiculing the idea of danger. She was surprised to see Maurice change colour at her words and glower vindictively at his wife.

'So that's the end of all this religious nonsense! I thought you had more sense—one of

you, at all events. No, you may trust me not to come too near. Was there ever such an idiot?'

'Maurice, for shame! You talk like an atheist, when I thought you were reformed. You ought to be, I'm sure, after all Mrs. Elphinstone's trouble with you. If I do die of it, I shall at least know that I caught it in a good cause. Ah, you may sneer, though it ill becomes you! There is a blessing on those who remember the widow and the fatherless.'

'Smallpox—a blessing I don't covet, personally.'

'There is not the slightest risk,' laughed Gertrude scornfully, while her eyes dwelt in wonder upon Maurice. He had more than once informed her that he was a coward, but she had never quite believed him until now.

'Don't expect me to nurse you,' he continued spitefully. 'It's your own doing; you must bear the consequences. It takes some days to show itself, that's one blessing.'

Bella, able to bear it no longer, tottered out of the room.

'How dare you bully her like that?' said Gertrude.

'How dare you aid and abet her in such lunacy? Bringing Heaven knows what foul germs into the house from the atmosphere of pestilential, stinking slums. You can take care of yourself; she can't. You'd never catch anything, because you aren't afraid. Nurses and Joans of Arc bear charmed lives.'

It was a week ere Gertrude went again to Eaton Place. Harry having an attack of his Indian fever, she removed to his house to tend him; and it was on her return to the flat one early morning, after five days' absence, that she found a note from Bella adjuring her to 'keep away, because I'm ill—I've got it.' This had been written on the previous evening. Gertrude set off at once to see what was really the matter.

'Can I see Mrs. Cumnor?' she inquired of the footman, Henry, the same who had accompanied them on that fatal errand of mercy. His face was pale, and wore a doomed look.

'Can't say, I'm sure, ma'am; Mrs. West will tell you. If you'll kindly step this way, I'll fetch her to you.'

Mrs. West, the housekeeper, could not say any more than could the footman.

'I'll take you to the door, ma'am; but she's got it locked, and won't let no one enter. The doctor was here last evening and saw her, and talked to the master; but 'tis unknown what he said, for the master went out directly after, and has not come back. 'Tis thought he may have gone to Sandset Manor, Bedfordshire, his father's mansion, called away sudden. We're in a state, ma'am, here without him, not knowing where to turn for orders. 'Tis feared to be nothing less than smallpox in the house, and the maids have all packed off. Me and the butler and poor Henry's all that's found faithful. And we can't do nothing much without the master, for from the way she scream at us there's no doubt she's

hilarious. She swears she'll let no one in unless it's the doctor or a trained nurse. You see, ma'am, she can't have titivated, and she's so used to it that, without, she'd feel as shamed as I should if surprised without my clothes on.'

'You must force the door,' said Gertrude. 'You needn't be afraid; it can't be smallpox.'

She went in a cab to Maurice Cumnor's chambers; he was not there, and was driven on to St. Pancras, where she had to wait an hour for a train, which proved a slow one. The only fly to be procured at the station nearest Sandset was of the torpid, winter kind, which crawls benumbed. By the time she passed the park gates the sun was losing strength, and small birds, recovering from the heat of the day, waxed vociferous. She had not paused to consider what construction her inroad might bear in minds so hostile as those of the Cumnors; but now, with sight of the house, misgivings assailed her. What would Theo think? He was certain to disapprove of her coming there on such an errand, and, with his wife to prompt him, might jump to vile conclusions.

Alighting at the door, she bade the driver wait, and, as she turned from giving the injunction, found herself face to face with Theo, who with Jack Cumnor was sallying forth to shoot rabbits.

'Gertrude! You here? Anything wrong? Did you want to see me?'

'Is Mr. Maurice Cumnor here?'

'Oh yes . . . of course!'

There was a world of bitter reproach in that

'of course.' Jack, behind Theo on the steps, grinned broadly and surveyed her as a connoisseur.

'Maurice, did you say? Came down last night in the worst of tempers, and to-day has got gout, which accounts for it.'

'His wife has been taken suddenly ill. I've come from her.'

'Oh, that's another matter; I'll call the butler to show you in properly.'

In the hall she met Olive, who, on recognition, appeared enchanted, and introduced her to the mistress of the house as 'Mrs. Elphinstone, Theo's cousin, come down after Maurice.' She was not surprised to be made welcome with the stiffness appropriate to the reception of improper persons. Having explained the true nature of her errand, and its urgency, she was taken to the smoking-room, where Maurice sulked alone. He sprang up at sight of her. Olive, having announced her, banged the door ostentatiously, and they were alone together.

Maurice did not wait to be informed of her purpose in thus confronting him, but at once, ere she could say a word, began to combat it. He advised her forcibly to return whence she came, and the next minute took the tone of an ardent wooer. He stamped about the room in a fury, then sat down and pathetically nursed the foot defined by bandages. It exasperated him to find these manifestations treated but as well-known symptoms by a sick-nurse, or expected naughtiness by a nurse of children.

Having let his comic rage exhaust itself, she began:

'Now, Maurice'—the name, quite new from her, fixed his attention—'if you don't put on your boots at once and come with me, I shall let every one here know the full extent of your meanness—how you ran away, like the hired servants, the moment you heard that your wife and benefactress had got the smallpox.' At that word Maurice winced most horribly. 'Now I'm going, and you know what to expect.'

He bade her stop.

'I'm coming; only wait. I must go slowly, can't get well all at once.'

He rang the bell, called for boots, and when they arrived, asked her to put them on for him, pretending helplessness. She had to reiterate her threat, with hand on the door.

The whole house gathered to witness the strange departure. Jack had deferred his rabbit-shooting to watch the event of her embassy, but Theo had gone his way—in anger, as she guessed miserably.

In the fly, her charge was silent save for occasional growls. Both looked out upon the hedgerows, like black locks in the twilight. But at sight of the station lamps he moved uneasily, and expressed, with an oath, his dislike to be stared at just now. She saw in his rudeness an attempt at vengeance, and despised it. Nothing he might do or say should make her angry. She had a second-class return ticket, but he insisted on their travelling first, to be alone, and she yielded

as on a matter of complete indifference, though, in truth, she knew not what to fear from his spiteful mood. Having got her alone, he said all in his power to enrage her; but she preserved the demeanour of a nurse in charge of a lunatic, well up to her business, and finding no call for exertions in mere twaddle.

'So this is your precious piety!' he snarled at length. 'Meddling in affairs which don't concern you, and dragging a poor devil to probable death, certain disfigurement, with that face of faith, hope, and charity. You believe, I suppose, that this will be counted to you for righteousness up there. Pshaw! The whole creed's a farrago of nonsense, like your Bible.'

He proceeded to demolish the Bible, showing it to abound in contradictions, figments, lies. In the light of modern discovery, no sane person but must think it rubbish.

'I'm content to be mad, if you are sane just now, dear Maurice!'

She was smiling, not a bit offended. He ravened to destroy that sweet composure, a studied insult to his harrowed nerves.

'You don't really believe in a Deity that made us what we are, or you wouldn't be trying to divert one of His creatures from the course allotted. God made me a coward.'

'I don't believe God made *you* at all!'

'Well, that's a nice thing to say!'

'And it was not at all as a "creature" that I came after you, but as a friend of mine who was trying to do something he would regret his whole life long.'

'But I say, you can't really believe in all that bosh? You see a joke as well as I do. You're laughing now instead of trying to convert me.'

'Perhaps I ought to have taken your remarks more seriously. Forgive me, if I've been rude.'

'Oh, not at all!' sneered Maurice, and kept silence, looking out on the dark country.

When he spoke again, it was in a different tone, one complaining of cruelty.

'I suppose you and your blessed prophet never had religion, honour, and all that, bullied into you till it seemed a curse, and you hated Sunday as a day in irons. If you had, you wouldn't have preserved such placid faith in old conundrums. My brothers were dutiful boys, supporters of the established order, but I rebelled, and, being physically weak, got punished. Eustace, to give the devil his due, always tried to be just, but Jack was a regular bully. I met with plenty of his sort at school, and they fell upon me as their natural prey. All I did in the way of learning was thought nothing of at home. I was a liar and a coward and a sneak; I dealt in subtleties where men were downright. Though I never cost my father much from the day I went to Harrow, thanks to the dirty little trick of winning scholarships, I got no thanks; and at last when, at twenty-two, I got into a mess about a girl on the estate, the daughter of a valued tenant, and wouldn't do the honourable thing, I was cut off from the family, and never again received at Sandset till I married Bella for her money just three years ago, and by then I'd made a name

and a fairish practice. . . . You've not been attending! You don't show proper horror.'

She replied:

'You leave out the good too pointedly. Isn't it what is called fishing for compliments?'

'Good Lord!' was all Maurice could ejaculate. After a pause he said: 'If you're trying to get round me, that I may go to my death like a lamb, I warn you it's no use. I only came with you to avoid fresh scandal down at home, and because, on second thoughts, I live in London. In the country I shrivel up like a seaweed out of water. We're passing Hendon now. At St. Pancras I desert.'

She allowed him the little triumph of escape at the terminus, and returned to her own place, unwilling to seem to spy upon his movements. Calling in Eaton Place after church next morning, she was received by Maurice, quite in his old manner, making the scenes of yesterday irretraceable as lines drawn on water.

'She's still in bed,' he observed; 'but she'd like to see you. The doctor describes the complaint as "sympathetic"; I know she'd been reading up symptoms. He's sure now it isn't smallpox. I fancy you knew this all the while, my fair deceiver, and for that I shall owe you a grudge to my dying day.'

Though his words were thus vindictive, there was something new and pleasant in his bearing towards her.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A NEW ALLY

At Sandset, the flying visit of Gertrude, and her tell-tale command of Maurice, had the effect of a brazen trumpet publishing relations till then but darkly suspected. Theo wrote angrily to remonstrate with his cousin, but she replied with evident laughter, bidding him mind his own business. She even carried war into his camp by declaring idleness to be bad for him, and reminding him of his promise to seek fresh employment. There was nothing seriously wrong, he felt sure; but he resented the prowl of Maurice round his vineyard, and wished that Gertrude had not signalized her liking for the beast.

The advent of Colonel Oldfield and his daughter in September somewhat cheered him, for Mary took up the cudgels nobly on behalf of Gertrude, and on the very evening of arrival floored poor Jack, who, regarding perfumed vice and breezy virtue as two opposite poles, between which males might oscillate, but females never, felt it incumbent on him to warn his angel delicately against Theo's cousin.

'I wouldn't have much to do with her, if I were you!'

'Why not?' she inquired, with lucid gaze transfixing him.

Pinned to an explanation, he wriggled miserably, preferring death to plain speech to her on such a subject.

'Well, she isn't quite nice, you know.'

'I like her extremely.'

'Well . . . you know! . . . there's Maurice.'

'Yes, I know he exists.'

'Well, what I mean is, there's something wrong with her.'

'I assure you there is not. I know her much better than you do. How dare you hint like that about a friend of mine!'

She turned her back on him conclusively, when the unfortunate moralist bit the dust. With repentant sighs he ate his opinions, and said grace at the meal. If not of the number of Mrs. Elphinstone's champions, strengthened shortly by the adherence of a paladin in Lady Pettigrew, Jack was at all events eager thenceforth to allow her the benefit of a doubt.

But the existence of a strong supporting faction in the house, instead of easing Theo's plight, increased its bitterness. Olive, with the stimulus of opposition, grew more and more vindictive in attacks on Gertrude, and he was glad, when the day came for their return to town, to leave the stiff old manor, home of all uncharitableness, amid its girdling woods no longer verdant, grown still and sombre in autumnal haze.

The perpetual lash of Olive's tongue had kept revolving in his mind a doubt, which had no right

there, as to the lengths of Gertrude's intimacy with Maurice Cumnor. To lay this ghost of a misgiving, he called at the flat immediately upon arrival in London, when his cousin's joy at sight of him, though reassuring, could not prevent him from delivering the exhortation with which he had come primed. She heard him with wide-open eyes, lips slightly parted, as though doubting the evidence of her senses; then, at some probing word of his, flushed suddenly and stood before him in imperial anger.

'How dare you, Theo! you, of all men living! What do I care what people say, or think? But you! you! Leave me! Go, I say!' She stamped her foot with the injunction, but he still must argue, and without the slightest warning she was caught in a storm of weeping. Theo's arms were round her in a trice, but she flung him off, and stood at bay, deprived of tears. Coming to realize that she was in earnest, he obeyed her repeated injunction, and went.

How good of Theo to condemn her intercourse with Maurice Cumnor, when he himself alone had power to stir her depths!

Maurice was her true friend, since she had beheld his weakness. His desire and cool intention to reduce her had given place to a much more generous sentiment which scorns mere aims. To have seen him at his worst and not be nauseated, raised her above the human in his thoughts. He confessed to her with disgust his past designs; how he had actually fanned his sister's silly jealousy to the end that Theo

might be kept from visiting her; and seemed astounded when she only smiled. Anxious now to undo what mischief he had done, he went to Olive with the intentions of a peacemaker. It was a Saturday afternoon, dull and showery. She sat alone and listless in her little drawing-room, not expecting visitors, to judge by the start she gave on his announcement.

'Oh, is it you, Maurice? I've been wanting to get at you. I hear you still go telling people that I made Theo give up that hateful business. It isn't true; and it simply shows your usual meanness.'

'It is on that very subject, among others, that I've come to talk to you,' said Maurice conciliatorily. 'I've ascertained that it can all be set right. Theo can go back to the old work if he likes. The man who took his place is leaving in a fortnight; and I want you to persuade him to do so.'

'How nice!' cried Olive, deeply interested. 'And how very, very good of you, Maurice, to go to all this trouble! How can we ever repay you?'

'Please be serious! Has the scheme your approval?'

'Certainly not! It is an insult to me, and Theo, too! As if he could go back! As if I should let him—to the triumph of you and Mrs. Elphinstone! I know why you're here; you're just the cat's-paw of that woman, who hates me. I won't have her interfering!'

Maurice then addressed her earnestly, without

a trace of his wonted sarcasm; and she listened in surprise to this new thing.

'Hear me, child, or you'll ruin your whole life. Marriage among us nervous cerebral moderns must be in essence a civil contract, never a bondage. Now, in every contract there is the element of compromise; some sort of reciprocity is expected and enjoined; and if one party takes all he or she can get, and gives nothing in exchange, the treaty is broken in effect, and the other can regard it as a dead-letter. Here you are in a very cosy drawing-room, in a comfortable little house, in a good neighbourhood—all which you chose and your husband pays for. You persuade him to reduce his income by one-third—or, at any rate, allow him to do so, more or less, for your sake. I have not heard of any wish on your part for a corresponding retrenchment——'

'You're most unjust, Maurice!' exclaimed Olive in a strangled voice.

'Then you henpeck him unmercifully. You attack his friends. You try to reform his character, which was hard-set before you knew him, and of course you get hurt in the attempt. In assailing his personality, you lay hands on a whirring wheel——'

'How interesting! I had no idea Mrs. Elphinstone observed my ways so closely.'

'Why drag her in?'

'Because you come from her! She's been going on at Theo; now she tries to work on me. It's really funny to see you her carrier-pigeon.

I suppose she rewards you. Go and report progress!'

'Don't be vulgar!' said Maurice fastidiously. He saw that he had made things worse instead of better, and was sorry. But his own earnestness embarrassed and tripped him like a sword worn for the first time.

## CHAPTER XXII

### OLIVIA YIELDS A POINT

OLIVE leaned one elbow on the mantelpiece, pressed her forehead into the crotch of it, and stared fixedly down into the glowing coals. So long as she remembered Maurice, resentment nerved her; but when she came to think of herself her strength gave way. She sank into a chair and wept convulsively.

'Well, I declare, ma'am! What a start you gave me!' Emily knelt down by her mistress to repair the fire. She was too well trained directly to remark on Olive's state. After poking the fire savagely, so as to rake out its entrails, she suspired: 'Things don't seem right, somehow.'

'It's my fault things go wrong, Emily. Mr. Maurice has been vexing me as usual.'

'You shouldn't heed him, ma'am; he's just a tease. But I should like to know how it's your fault.'

'I can't like people to order.'

'If it's that Mrs. Elphinstone, I'm sure no wonder. She's that free and easy, and high in her manners, when she ought to hide her head for sin and shame, the way she treats her husband, settin' her cap at other people's!'

'Emily!' cried Olive with severe intent.

'It's a shame, I will say it, to take such a lady as you from the best o' homes, and then make her life a burden. I wish we'd never left, to come here, ma'am, often and often, that I do. And I wish Mr. Eustace was here sometimes'—Emily esteemed Mr. Eustace best and kindest of all men living, an opinion pretty general in the servants' hall at Sandset—'he's never set foot in this house. It's my fear he knew what would come of it.'

'I'll write and ask him, just to satisfy you.'

Emily's ignorant talk was senseless, she well knew; yet the picture of Gertrude 'setting her cap' at Theo remained with Olive, vulgar, deplorable. 'The very servants are talking,' occurred to her as a reproach which sounded gongs of infamy. Apostrophizing Theo in imagination, she evolved a scene.

Theo had gone that afternoon for a country walk with Warne, as she well knew; yet when he came in about six o'clock, she, sneering, asked: 'How's Gertrude?' and he was naturally annoyed. There ensued an argument, a quarrel on her part. She enjoyed the old sensation of beating a firm wall, dear, even in the heat of strife, as part of their hidden life together.

'The very servants talk of it,' she informed him, raining blows upon her wall.

The excitement was intense, and she hated herself for revelling in it, but could not desist until he left off arguing, which he was slow to do.

Gertrude Elphinstone, her kindness, her good

sense, her independence, all that constituted her personality, all people said and thought about her, was on Olive's nerves. After one of Bella's dull state dinners, Lady Pettigrew sat down by Olive in the drawing-room, and sang the praise of Gertrude, who was present, until her victim could have shrieked.

'Such a captivating woman, and yet so unaffected, so sensible. Really no one can blame her for living apart from that tiresome individual who took you in to dinner. She's so manifestly his superior. You were all too ridiculous about her down at Sandset; I hate such strait-laced criticism. She hopes to come next summer to a little place in the Alpes Vaudoises, which, between ourselves, I am "pushing" on behalf of the local commune. The hotels (three in all) are new, and furnished with all modern conveniences. You might recommend it. Tell anyone who may think of going to write first to me.'

Woman's talk was withdrawn like a veil upon the entrance of the men, whose conversations, audible upon the stairs, ceased abruptly at the door of the drawing-room. Lady Pettigrew impounded her host. Captain Elphinstone came to Olive, who endured the anguish of seeing Theo drop into a seat by Gertrude, laughing with her in the careless, intimate way which always angered her. He never talked like that, so perfectly at ease, with his own wife.

Gertrude, beside the fire, held a hand-screen behind her neck while she turned her full face to Theo. To the woman watching, she seemed all

loveliness. Olive spent five minutes of utter humiliation, feeling out of the lists. Then Gertrude came across the room to her, and Theo followed—'like a dog,' she thought. His following robbed the movement of all grace.

He now never mentioned his cousin, unless questioned point-blank concerning her, when he answered curtly. This reticence set a distance between them, and increased her detestation of his dogged will, her enemy. She was resolved to die attacking it. While loving the man to distraction, she hated something in him with eternal hatred; yet all the while she knew herself to blame, and deserving the punishment of naughty children. If only he would use her as a child, and coax instead of reasoning! Love was childish. She could be grown up with others, never with him, because with him love ruled in her. Could he love her, she asked herself, yet fail to recognize the childish needs of love?

Eustace, whom, agreeably with her promise to Emily, she had asked to set foot in the house, found her, as Jack had found her, in tears. She pleaded headache; but he saw that she was sadly altered, and inwardly gnashed teeth with imprecations on the cad who, in little more than a year, had turned a sparkling girl into this sad-eyed woman.

Aware of the false impression he received, Olive was sorry. She had done her best to efface it. Tears were the outward sign of her admission that she was alone to blame for her own misery.

The stern refusal of Theo to submit to her his love for Gertrude frustrated all her life. It seemed she could never in this world be bright again.

Yet she felt almost happy when Theo informed her, tentatively and with much hesitation, that his friend Paul Tessier was to visit London for a month, in connexion with some proposed exhibition of French painters. 'He must come to us!' she said. It was delightful to be able to extend true welcome to a friend of his.

Paul came, and was her bondman. He took her about to picture-shops and galleries, and revealed to her the mysteries of fine art in rapid French, with oratorical frowns and gestures, till he saw she missed a point, when he lapsed suddenly into baby English, laughing merrily. He introduced her to quaint foreigners, who were all adoration; and throughout his stay transformed existence for her.

'I must take you to see Gertrude privately,' said Theo one evening, having Paul to himself.

'It is already arranged. I go with madame to-morrow.'

'Did my wife propose that?'

'Do I know?' Paul shrugged to the ears, and waved his cigar airily. 'We spoke of your cousin, and the project was born: voilà! What astonishes you?'

'Nothing in effect,' said Theo gladly.

'Your wife, my friend, is charming,' was Paul's verdict upon Olive, delivered near the end of his visit; 'but she needs comprehension and much

tenderness, being all temperament. She seems to be ill; she has lost that tint of health which she had formerly. Take her away this summer—to the sea—to the mountain—where there is good air. Too much of London smoke would fade a Ninon.'

Theo, having the gravest respect for Paul's judgment, broached the subject that same evening in the course of dinner.

'There's a little place the Pettigrew is touting for. Our going there would please the old lady, and she'd see you knew everybody!'

'Gertrude talks of going there,' said Olive with emphatic sweetness, and took all the wind out of Theo's sails.

If he had ever heard of Gertrude's summer plan, it had escaped his memory.

'Where is the difficulty?' asked Paul in a comic despair. 'I see the faces, but I hear nothing.'

'I give you my word of honour, Olive, that I had forgotten Gertrude was going to that place, if I ever knew it.'

'She wasn't quite certain when Monsieur Tessier and I called last.'

Paul wailed: 'I demand some explanation at this point. I have heard my own name.'

'We have discovered an objection to the place in question. Suggest another.'

Paul by a munificent gesture bestowed on them the whole world. 'But, believe me, it contains no place more enchanting for a summer sojourn. I know, having passed by there.'

'I dare say we can arrange to go,' said Olive, with sphinx-like composure.

'No, we'll think of somewhere else,' said Theo nervously.

'Go there, and, with madame's permission, I will give myself fifteen days of holiday, and join you.'

Olive clapped her hands. 'That settles it! Only promise faithfully, Monsieur Paul.'

Paul laid violent hands on his heart, and bound himself her servant by strange oaths. Olive dealt Theo a smile which gravelled him. What was it she wished him to understand?

'I wasn't thinking when I proposed that Swiss place,' he told her later in the evening.

'Weren't you?' she answered mockingly. 'The place sounds really nice, and I hope to go there, if you'll take me.'

'I tell you what I'll do then, I'll dissuade Gertrude. She'd have trouble with Harry anyhow, for it's not in their compact that she should go out of England. I'll manage it somehow, without dragging you in.'

'I've dragged myself in already. What do you suppose we were up to just now while you were out of the room? Monsieur Tessier and I were concocting an epistle to Gertrude asking her to join our party. He would keep inserting compliments which I thought too strong; you must have heard us laughing. She'll be some one for you to walk with, Theo; you know I'm no good for long tramps. And I'm going to belie my reputation, and be charming to both of you.'

A little hesitation would have sat well on him, she considered, at this juncture. But he received her sacrifice as a payment long delayed, with rapture and surprise, but no compunction. And the rapture was excessive.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### GERTRUDE LOOKS FORWARD

In her eyrie up above the London roofs Gertrude read Olive's letter again and again, trying to arrive at its true significance. A storm was advancing on the town—a dark cloud pushing before it spokes of light, which moved round scarcely perceptibly, like the minute-hand of a clock. Some steeple or tall chimney stood out brightly one minute, the next was lost in the maw of the purple gloom. A marigold stain was on the floor at her feet, on the wall opposite her. The forces of the sunlight seemed drawn up against her window for a last stand.

How was she to answer this strange effusion from Theo's wife? Was it peace, or truce, or some new stratagem? She was tempted by the prospect of long walks with Theo, in the course of which she might arouse in him ambitions. But on the whole she thought it wiser to refuse. She no longer felt entirely safe with Theo since he had kissed her once emotionally; distrusting unknown forces in herself. Had Olive been her friend she would not have hesitated; but as things were . . . decidedly it would be wiser not to go.

But just as she was clenching this decision Mrs. Moore was announced to her. She failed to catch the name from the servant's lips for the noise of thunder. The room was darkened, the light at the windows reduced to a copperish gloom. Olive flew to her with hands outstretched.

'You got my letter? Oh, you will come, won't you?'

'I will, if you really wish it—for part of the time.'

'All the time, please, please!'

'How long do you propose to go for?' Gertrude asked.

'I wish Theo would make haste,' moaned Olive wretchedly. 'We've been seeing Paul Tessier off, and Theo stopped to buy a razor. He was sure he could catch me up. Now he's out in this——'

'Here he is,' said Gertrude as a bell rang in the flat. 'I was going to say that I never meant to spend more than a month in Switzerland.'

'Oh, we thought of going for quite three months.'

Theo, entering, found them side by side upon a couch, Gertrude's arm encircling Olive.

'That's right!' he sang out.

Gertrude gave him a look meaning 'Stupid!' as Olive stiffened, and withdrew from her embrace.

'I've been saying that I can't possibly give more than a month to Switzerland—I've promised Harry.'

Theo, anxious to avoid a second blunder, proffered no comment on the information.

'Make it six weeks!' said Olive coaxingly. 'You would be with us. Captain Elphinstone wouldn't mind.'

Gertrude laughed.

'Perhaps I could manage that. At all events, I'll try.'

Harry, relieved to hear that his wife would not go abroad alone, but would have Theo Moore to look after her, and Theo's wife to satisfy convention, was with ease prevailed upon to extend her leave of absence. He even wished her to accept Olive's suggestion in its entirety.

But Gertrude shook her head.

'She didn't really mean it. I'm simply a penance she has set herself to undergo, and she'd be heart-broken if I refused altogether. People hate to be balked of merit. You know that yourself.'

'Perhaps you're right. I do like to see how much I can endure when there's some one by to applaud. I never could have become the man I am but for you. It will be hell without you, even for six weeks. Temptations are sure to crowd on me.'

'You'll come through them, I am sure, with flying colours.'

Her sympathy with his struggles was nowadays half acted. She had inspired them in the first place, and always encouraged them; but she could not invariably feel the deep interest he invariably demanded. She thought of herself sometimes, or her altruism was expended upon other objects.

It was an effort to stoop to his infinitesimal worries, to flatter his thirst for self-conquest expressed in such dull little ways. Maurice Cumnor's visits came as light and air to her after the exhaustion of long talks with her husband.

'I've just seen Olive,' Maurice remarked one wet afternoon in May, as she helped him off with his waterproof, 'and I congratulated her on her tardy conversion to the paths of reason. I fear, though, the conversion's but skin-deep, for I drew down a storm of epithets on my devoted head. Those fools at Sandset have been cracking up her charity in asking you. Eustace is angry; calls it a dangerous game. I wish I had their stupid heads all put together, and a pair of nutcrackers large enough. . . .'

'You spoke of my joining them abroad? How truly silly of you!'

'Oh, we say what we mean in our family.'

'And never out of it? I incline to believe you!'

'I may not wear my heart upon my sleeve, and yet have feelings.' Maurice crossed the room and held out his hands to the fire. 'A fire! A happy thought!'

'I made Jane light it to counteract the outdoor gloom. I'm glad I did so, since it pleases your Imperial Highness.'

'It does. You always please me.'

Gertrude disdained reply beyond a teasing smile, which he retorted, standing legs astride upon the hearthrug, looking down on her with an assumption of the lord and master. After

they had comprehended one another thus in silence for some time, he said:

'Don't let Olive have it all her own way! It is appalling to think what she may become if indulged in all her fancies. She needs the discerning friendship of a stronger woman.'

'Nonsense! The poor thing wants to be left alone.'

'Got a bone, you think!' flashed Maurice wickedly.

'Most of her unhappiness is Theo's fault. He is a very undiscerning husband, and quite inexperienced in feminine provocations. He's been used to me!'

'The most provoking woman in the round world! . . . So you mean to take the husband, not the wife, in hand? It's an idea new to me. But I rather incline to the view of my brother Eustace that it's a dangerous game for the happiness of all concerned.'

'I'm not like you, Maurice, a strategist. My one desire is to make that marriage go happily.'

Maurice closed his eyes and shuddered out from pinched lips:

'Can't be done. Incompatible nervous temperaments.'

'I don't believe in impossibilities of that description.'

'Indeed?—you living instance!' She laughed, compelled to face her inconsistency. 'How does Harry like the prospect? I must remember to look him up while you're away. Bella must ask him to the house. But I'm forgetting; she'll be down at Sandset.'

'Oh, Harry's as nice as he can be.'

Maurice shot at her a glance which made her blush, and observed:

'Rare candour in an official utterance.'

Fearing he had gone too far, he added casually:

'You'll receive a farewell visit from Olive to-morrow or the day after. They're to start on Thursday.'

Since the conclusion of their arrangement to join forces in a summer holiday, Gertrude had not seen Theo alone; Olive, in return for her great sacrifice, claiming the right to superintend their intercourse. She was, therefore, not a little surprised and pleased when, on the very morning of departure, he came alone to say good-bye to her.

She stood with one foot on the fender, an arm along the mantelpiece, her face half-turned from him.

'Theo, I've been thinking. Perhaps I had better not join you after all. She doesn't really want me. It's a sort of sacrifice. And I don't like going on those terms.'

His dismay was manifest.

'I beg you, on my own account, to come. It's what I've been looking forward to—the understanding which is sure to spring from close acquaintance. When once she gets to know you, all will be well. Sometimes it's like wrestling with Eblis in person. . . .'

'You do fight it, then?'

She turned her face still more from him, and smiled upon some flowers which masked the

grate. The movement seemed to slight him needlessly.

'Fight it? If I did not always fight it, if I let myself for one minute adopt her view of herself, of me, of our relations, of the world in general, I should hate my own wife and myself into the bargain. It's an illness, I believe, and a doctor could cure it. But she wouldn't go to one; I couldn't ask it, though there are times when she's so miserable she'd do any blessed thing to be rid of the nightmare. This invitation to you is the greatest effort she has made in the right direction. Don't, for pity's sake, frustrate it.'

He forthwith took his leave, seeming ashamed of his own eloquence. The disclosures he had made gave Gertrude much to ruminate. She would have liked to spend long hours alone in thought; but Harry claimed the moments, which, for him, were numbered. He magnified her outing to a mighty severance, and, as the time drew near for her to start, grew more and more exacting in small ways. When the day came at last, he went with her in a cab to the terminus, and there fussed round her till she could have shaken him. He took all manner of precautions for her safety, even bestowing half a sovereign on the grinning guard; and at last, when he had done all he could think of, he stood by the door of her compartment, looking so utterly forlorn that a sudden wave of tenderness came over her. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and kissed him ere taking her seat. A minute later she realized that he was sobbing.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### CLOSE QUARTERS

In the glow of the declining sun, Olive walked out from the Alpine village with Theo. The landscape of vague mysterious depths and defined summits, huge crests of light, and cumuli of shadow, with gleams of snow high up in the far distance, seemed to half-closed eyes a scene among the clouds. Olive kept her eyes half closed, partly because the sunset struck on them, partly in the effort to call up her courage. Down the steep green slopes they could see afar off a carriage, on a lower reach of road, crawling, with no advance apparent, like a wasp on honey.

'I don't feel equal to the climb up again. You go!' she told her husband.

'No, of course I shall wait with you.'

'Don't be silly. Please go!'

She called the fragrance of the air to aid, the high coolness, the tink of cow-bells, and the chirrup of the grasshoppers, the cropped lawns, clutching at all things steadfast to steady herself. The occasion was no extraordinary one; the personage to be received was a woman, not a fiend. She prayed for deliverance from her sick imaginings. She had been happy in the weeks

spent here with Theo, feeling stronger in the mountain air. But seeing her happiness as the gleam before the storm, she had made too much of it. All Theo meant to do apart from her had been deferred, at her request, till Gertrude's coming. Thus, now Gertrude came, he would be always with her. She could not, in reason, further disappoint him; and she herself abhorred long tramps through endless trees, or over rocks and grass and flowers, eternally the same. The rhythm of harness-bells gradually approaching had become a part of her stupor, when they jangled of a sudden close to her, the carriage stopping.

'Here we are!' cried Theo.

She saw him help out a woman who looked tired, and was so thankful for the sight of nothing worse that her embrace and polite inquiries were quite cordial. Gertrude responding, they laughed and chatted gaily up the road to the hotel.

Even Gertrude's astonishment at the sight of Emily was not resented as impertinent by Olive. She condescended to explain that Emily had been looking ill, and required a holiday, and really was so invaluable that she could not think what she would have done without her. Emily, on her side, cast down her eyes in presence of Mrs. Elphinstone, and shut her mouth tightly. She would not commit herself to an opinion as yet, but had forebodings. Had Theo shown less relief in his face, Olive would have thought it all quite natural, and forgotten bygones.

Theo was to blame, too, in the days which

followed. He said, 'May I come in?' when he found his wife with Gertrude, appealing to Olive as though in doubt of her consent. When it was a question of a long walk, he made a fuss about leaving his wife alone, as if, thanks to Lady Pettigrew, she were not on speaking terms with all the English in the place. His delight in Gertrude was transparent, and to be expected; he might have spared himself the hypocrisy of pretending to indulge it under protest.

Then one day he changed his tactics so abruptly that Olive knew that something had been said to him, and resented the interference of a third person all the more because it was intelligent. Such intelligence struck her all at once as devilish. Her distrust of the woman reared its head again like a serpent out of sleep. Theo now set off with Gertrude as a matter of course without consulting Olive, who missed the deference which had annoyed her. When Mary Oldfield accompanied them it was well, but Mary was much in attendance on her father, who was growing feeble, and they were generally alone. They had slipped beyond Olive, out of her control. And the more she thought evil of their lonely rambles, the more was she incensed by the candour of their demeanour in public. Could they be unconscious of their impropriety, then were they lower than the beasts that perish. Olive called her tingling ears to witness how they talked of things unmentionable as lightly as of the weather. There was nothing veiled between them. The woman must be shameless. But when she lectured Theo

mildly on this point of decency, he got so angry that, for once, she cowered.

That passage, and the long cry afterwards on Emily's breast, confirmed her worst suspicions. Theo hated her now as clearly as he loved her rival. In his anger, which had lasted all one night, he had gone off with Gertrude that morning. She could hear them talking of her, sneering at her narrow mind, her petty jealousy. Already Theo's peace had been disturbed; he was becoming unsettled by that woman's influence, longing for daring work, for adventures that would take him far from her. Now, offended as he was, he might easily be persuaded to do something desperate.

Hours passed, and he did not return. Dinner-time came, without a sign of him or Gertrude. Olive, unwilling to go down to the meal and be stared at, moped in her bedroom. Lady Pettigrew, coming up to inquire what ailed her, called her a little fool, which furthered nothing.

When the truants appeared at length, she would speak to neither of them. Theo ran up to the bedroom, all goodwill, but strove in vain to wrest a look from her. Then came Gertrude, who remonstrated kindly, but in a way which showed that she knew the grounds of the quarrel. Theo had told her! It was the last straw!

'Would you rather I went away? I can find some good excuse to go at once.'

Olive shook her head emphatically, moaning: 'No. Please don't go!' It was, in sooth, the last

thing she wished. In the background of her mind lurked a consciousness of her own unreason. She would have felt for ever humiliated had Gertrude returned to England as the outcome of this quarrel. It would be to point a finger at her (Olive), leaving her the laughing-stock and reproach of the gay summer colony. On the contrary, she cherished a little malicious project of going off herself with Emily, supposing the worst came to the worst, leaving the guilty pair in disconcertion.

'Well, I confess I don't understand you.'

Gertrude, going out, passed Emily in the bare deal corridor, and disliked the look on her tear-stained face intensely.

'They'll talk me over now. What shall I do?' wailed Olive.

'I'll find out what they're contrivin', and tell you, my sweet lamb!' whispered the old servant to calm her.

'Your wife is really ill, I'm afraid,' said Gertrude to Theo, whom she found sitting on a bench by the roadside. He had been trying to throw off his troubles in play with some small children—Russian—who should have been in bed an hour before. 'Really she must see a doctor. Get one to call as a friend of yours, and take her unawares. If she lets herself go like this it will end in insanity. I'll go back again and see what I can do for her.'

A shadow fled before Gertrude up the dim passage and the stairs beyond. She heard a slam, and the shoot of a bolt, and when she tried Olive's

door it was locked against her. Breathless whispers could be heard within.

'May I come in?' she called, but no one answered. There was dead silence for a moment, then more whispering.

Olive's indisposition was freely discussed in the hotel, and its nature shrewdly suspected. A group of young Englishwomen waylaid Gertrude at the foot of the stairs, and Mary Oldfield said: 'I've known Olive years, and we were always friends. Shall I go up and try?'

'The door's locked. And she's not alone. Her maid is with her.'

'Oh, that maid!'

Olive, locked in her room, with dry eyes now, but shaking from head to foot, was writing to Eustace hastily by the light of a candle—a cold statement of facts glaring like a show of cruel teeth.

'Don't give another thought to that! I'll see it stamped and posted,' said Emily, receiving the blessed missive which meant justice for her darling. Mr. Eustace would be safe to see things righted.

Theo, locked out of his bedroom, chose to tramp through the night.

In the morning Paul Tessier turned up unexpectedly at breakfast. He had started from Bex at daybreak and walked up from the plain. A knapsack strapped to his shoulders, flowers in the band of his hat, he appeared *en vrai Alpiniste*, to the stupefaction of the English. Theo went up to Olive, who at length deigned to speak to him.

He was begged to make her excuses to Monsieur Tessier. She was not well enough to go down to breakfast.

'Oh, sir, how could you keep away all night and her so miserable?' Emily reproached him, without looking, while she rummaged in a wardrobe.

Theo replied to Olive:

'The door was locked when I tried it.'

'It was opened directly after; you might have tried again,' she complained, as one worn out.

'I was up in the forest and on the slopes above. There was a lovely moon.'

'Was Gertrude with you?'

'No; she wanted to come, but I wouldn't let her. She'd had enough exercise for one day. I slept at last in a log shanty full of jolly hay; had a bath in a torrent at the spiritual moment of the dawn—when Diana bathes, you know—and found it a real baptism. I was another man.'

'How can you, Theo?' murmured Olive plaintively. It being clear that she wished to be regarded as a poor invalid, he offered to telegraph to Bex for a doctor.

'Oh dear, no, thank you! I'm not insane!' she replied viciously, with a laugh that made him shudder.

'How is she?' asked Gertrude, set with Paul at breakfast, and, upon his reporting, said: 'I'm moving to the Bellevue; it seems best for all parties. Jules has found out that they can take me, and is going to wheel my traps up in an hour.'

'My hands are tied, you see,' said Theo, champing his moustache.

Paul, apprised of their trouble, rolled his eyes funnily.

'While madame shuts herself up, no one can do anything, it seems to me.'

Every one coming to breakfast inquired after Olive.

'Much better, thanks,' was Theo's formula.

'I'm thoroughly disgusted with her,' said Lady Pettigrew aside to Gertrude. 'She has spoilt your visit, and every one feels uncomfortable. It's nothing but hysteria. Mr. Moore is not severe enough. She has made a scandal already. If she doesn't look out, she'll be giving us a tragedy. Of course she must see a doctor.'

Paul, in his halting English, asked to be allowed the ravishment of kissing Mrs. Moore's hand. Lady Pettigrew screwed up her mouth reprovingly; he so evidently expected to be taken to Olive's bedside. She said in French:

'We have our customs, dear monsieur. You are neither priest nor doctor.'

Olive came down to luncheon, supported to the foot of the stairs by Emily—the complete invalid. The note of raillery ringing through all kind inquiries stung her to reprisals, which she had much ado to keep languid. They all took the other side, all scoffed at her. It was some satisfaction to know she had invoked Eustace. Perhaps he would reply in person, and enforce respect. Theo's solicitude was as insulting as the ridicule of the others. Monsieur Paul alone

accepted her own estimate of herself as a sufferer much to be pitied; and on him she smiled, feebly, always in character.

Seeing a fine afternoon, he carried out chairs and set them under an apple-tree, amid the pastures, at a stone's-throw from the hotel. There she sat with him for hours, ignoring Theo, 'engaged,' as Mary Oldfield scathingly remarked, 'in a flirtation such as would have cost the heart's blood of poor Mr. Moore had he dared to indulge in it.'

When informed of Gertrude's change of domicile, Olive blushed up to the eyes, taking it as a personal affront. It did indicate to onlookers the true nature of Mrs. Moore's sad illness; but then, onlookers had no need of indication. This Theo knew, but could not tell his wife. However, thanks to Paul's tactful management, in a day or two Olive resumed the demeanour she had worn before the last grand outburst. She even received Gertrude back into the old semblance of favour, and Theo was allowed to go for walks with her as of yore. But he availed himself charily of the permission, and abjured long outings.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A PUNITIVE EXPEDITION

In the smoking-room at Sandset, after breakfast, Eustace let Jack look at Olive's letter. He had not said a word about it to their father. Neither of the twain took seat, nor lighted pipe, which was proof sufficient of their dire dismay.

'What the deuce is to be done?' said Jack disconsolately. 'I wish, old chap, you weren't so down on Maurice. He's got a head on his shoulders, and he knows the law. His advice 'd be useful just now.'

'He's mixed up with the woman.'

'He'll be as sick as we are at her taking up with Moore.'

'I want no advice. My course is clear as daylight.'

'What?'

Eustace expectorated:

'Thrash the beast!' whereupon Jack started.

The idea appealed to him as heroic — nay, poetical; but he shivered as he pointed out there might be consequences.

'There'll be a fine; I'll pay it. I start directly. Don't you come unless you like.'

'Of course I go with you,' said Jack, deeply hurt by the shadow of doubt.

'Mary Oldfield's there,' said Eustace warningly.

He would have said that their errand, being one of violence, was calculated to revolt a girl and prejudice her mind against them. Jack saw the issues clearly at a glance with the lucidity of a man in peril; yet still chose to go.

'Well, not a word to the others. We were going to town anyhow to-morrow about those horses, and said we might stop a day or two; we've decided to go to-day instead, that's all. . . . That rank outsider—admitted here on sufferance! —unfaithful to her! It's too damnable.'

Three hours later the brethren arrived in London, and by ten o'clock at night reached Paris.

It was such relief to stretch their limbs, stiff from hours of confinement in a crowded railway-carriage, that their minds in like manner opened out, yawning to the comprehension of topics other than their journey's end.

'If I think of this day and night I shall go mad,' said Eustace in the station grill-room. 'We neither of us want to sleep. Let's find somewhere to pass the time till 3 a.m., when I see there's a train on.'

'I'll ask the waiter,' said Jack, who, among other properties of the weaker vessel, boasted some knowledge of the foreign tongue.

The waiter, assailed in bad French, retaliated with bad English, to the relief of Eustace, who put no faith in Jack's interpreting. He received

the inquiry gravely, and submitted divers plans for their amusement. Finding they had no predilections, being strange to Paris, he chose for them a certain 'bal public,' the resort of foreigners, and, escorting them out into the street, hailed a fiacre and told the coachman where to drive. A few wayfarers flitting moth-like between the lamps; a gendarme at a street-corner, motionless with his hands behind him; trees which seemed of paper where the gaslight shone through their foliage; lighted *kiosques* in the motley of advertisements, Japanese-looking posters — all this, with the clatter made by their cab and other late vehicles on the cobblestones, made Paris streets more foreign to the avenging heroes than if seen by day.

Deposited before a lighted entry, they paid the sum asked by the driver, and, after a moment's parley at a little wicket, entered an atmosphere of forced hilarity—music, laughter, light, in every corner of a large and crowded hall. Jack succumbed at once to the blandishments of a siren who kicked his hat off with a shout of 'All right!' She hung on his neck when Eustace turned to look for him.

'We're going to have some refreshments, old man,' said Jack apologetically.

Eustace went with them, just for company, having no mind to roam alone in that unbridled crowd, defenceless in his innocence of their accursed gibberish. A fairy, flying to whisper some ethereal secret in the ear of Jack's charmer, sat down by inadvertence upon Eustace's knee,

and there reposed a full minute ere turning a roguish face to see how he enjoyed it. In the mood for any savagery, he girdled her with his arm and, finding that she spoke a little English and was, or claimed to be, own sister to the beauty clasping Jack, made much of her.

At a little after three in the morning, the brethren sat silent in a first-class smoking compartment, gliding out from Paris with progressive speed. They puffed doggedly at their pipes, and stared hard out of the window nearest to them. An odour of patchouli and scented powder clung to them sickeningly, the sour aftertaste of a sweet. A pallor of dawn was stealing across the flats where villages looked unfinished in the dimness. Here and there a factory chimney loomed, like a column commemorating something out of mind, or the belfry of a church appeared, a sightless casque.

As the train gathered speed, the flight of objects grew more crowded. Stacks like a row of beehives, black against the sky, the rose of dawn behind them, wrung the first word from Eustace.

'Nice lot o' ricks, that!'

The ice was broken. They talked at drowsy intervals, laughing without much zest over their night's diversion.

Past Fontainebleau in a land of pleasant hills, earth blushed to the sunrise.

'Gad though, that's pretty!' The concession seemed wrung from Eustace, who added with apparent irrelevancy: 'To think there are such swine in the world!'

Upon that Jack, whose reflections raced in channels of remorse, thinking on Mary Oldfield, gave a groan. Then, with a strain at lightsomeness, he put the case for his backslidings. They were not heinous, barely reprehensible, he made it appear. It was only when a chap was over head and ears in love with the purest of women that he felt a beast. He shadowed forth two worlds, an upper and a nether; woman moved in one or the other, man in both; whence these startling ups-and-downs. Allowances must surely be made, he concluded, with a harrowed glance at the lighted sky.

Eustace, who had listened mystified, explained, 'I was thinking of that brute Moore.'

'Oh, ah!' said Jack, enlightened, and he held his tongue.

Soon both were nodding to sleep. They dozed, with intervals, till after nine o'clock, when at a big provincial station their compartment was invaded.

That same afternoon they found themselves seated in a shabby carriage, crawling up a road that meandered in and out of forest, always upward. The chime of the horse's bells irritated Eustace as a satire on their slow progression. The landscape hid and revealed its charms coquettishly, now showing nothing but pine-trees, now pastured slopes and groups of deep-roofed chalets, anon, with a bounteous gesture, disclosing a whole small world, the lovely valley upon whose undulant southern slope their road was winding. It was a garden warded by huge

mountains on which the shadow of opponent crags was slowly rising, absorbing all the forest. On high, the sunlit grass and rocks seemed a thing apart from earth, some magic of the upper air that fashions clouds.

'What a land!' Jack cried enthusiastically. A bath before lunch at Lausanne had washed backsliding out of his remembrance. In Eustace, the unmercurial, it had wrought no change, save in the way of vigour. His mind set teeth in the thought of the scoundrel Moore, and shook and worried it in the tightest grip of execration. 'Remember why we're here,' he said sternly. It was not his intention to see anyone until he had avenged the wrong to Olive.

Dismissing their fly at the entering in of the village, they made for the first hotel with a view to refreshment. The place overflowed with delicate summer toilettes, with which Jack's eyes dallied, but Eustace strode ahead like fate immutable.

'Hullo! Here's Emily!' He stopped suddenly.

The maid, on her way to the post, thus accosted, gave thanks to Heaven.

'Oh, Mr Eustace, sir! Mr. Jack! I do thank my God you've come. The goin's-on there 've been, no one would believe—and him once so fond of her—and all for that woman. . . . Well, some calls her handsome. She's proud, if that's anything, and no better than she should be, or she'd never carry on with a married gentleman the way she does, and her a married lady. They're off together this minute; I just passed

'em—up to them woods, the "forry," as they call it. Ah, them woods hide a deal, and a good thing too, I'm sure, for my lamb frets enough as it is, let alone if all them trees was took away, and all was seen. She don't speak half o' what she feels—not half! It's crool, Mr. Eustace, Mr. Jack. And her of such a fam'ly, so superior to him and his friend and all such doings! It'll do her good to know there's friends at hand; though one she has, it's true, but only foreign. And Mr. Jack, too! He'll never dare go on as he's doin' now her brother's here. But it's seemed so far away, and these poor Switzerland folk no better than sheep or goats; they just saunter and munch and stare. You'll come to her now, sir?'

'No,' said Eustace flatly, 'and don't you tell her we've come. It's her husband we've got to deal with. Which way did he go with the woman?'

'That's the path, sir. If you come where I stand you can see it plainly. But oh, Mr. Eustace, Mr. Jack, do nothing hasty! There's the law, and then the talk there'd be. And they're peaceable folks hereabouts. And my mistress, I don't know what she'd say, if anything was to happen.'

By free use of vague assurances, Eustace disengaged himself from her anxious pleading. Following her directions, he set forward. The whole valley was in shadow; only the yonder wall was sun-embattled, high up against a clear blue evening sky. Pines clothed the heights above them, like a great black fleece. The jangle of many cowbells, the quaver of the grasshoppers,

and the muffled roar of torrents in the distance, combined to produce a constant drone of sound, as peaceful as dead silence and more drowsy, for silence lies expectant of some sound. For the brethren it was a warlike rumour, beseeming a valley thus walled up to heaven to form a furnace for the wrath of man.

'Have you got the crop?' asked Jack, as they approached the edge of the forest. Eustace showed the hunting-crop without speaking. It had been in his hand all the while, held down so straight at his side that Jack had not seen it.

Beneath the tossed pine-gables was a hall of columns, its floor, strewn with mast and encumbered with boulders, sloping upwards steeply. The light within was dim and, somehow, awesome. Soon they had to tread very gingerly, for the path had dwindled to the merest track among rocks overgrown with moss and cranberry, and rendered treacherous by the litter of pine-needles. The brethren, ill-equipped for climbing, laboured on as best they could, often on all fours.

'No good going on, is it?' said Jack, taking advantage of two square feet of level to fetch breath. 'We can't hope to overtake them, and they may come down some other way. Call this a path! We'd better do as old Emily said: go back and have some grub. See that squirrel?'

At the introduction of a paltry squirrel, Eustace swore roundly. His was the true heroic mood, which brooks no fall to earth, no tame diversion. To turn back, having come so far, was to court ridicule. Down every one of the countless vistas

of sleek pine-trunks he saw ridicule waiting to point a fat forefinger.

'Come on, can't you?' he said angrily.

Jack, whose glimmerings of reason seemed puerile beside his brother's noble madness, obeyed without a word, and on they floundered.

'Here's the end of the wood!' Jack panted with prospective relief. But the break proved to be but a small glade of sward, fairly level, beyond which the forest continued, black, interminable. 'But, hang it all, need we go on climbing? This may last for ever!'

'Save your breath, then!' was the unfeeling retort.

Both waited to recover that they had lost.

'Don't you hear voices? There, that's a clear laugh. They're coming back this way.'

'Don't be too sure! The place swarms with visitors. May be a favourite walk.'

'Nice way to bring a woman. There they are, by Jove! That's Moore right enough. They're holding hands; he's helping her.'

Theo emerged first from the gloom of the further forest. He turned and held out his hand, which Gertrude, running, caught and swung him round. The impetus of her run down carried her to the middle of the glade.

'Pretty,' murmured Eustace, as a reaper, leaning on his scythe, might admire flowers among the grass he has to cut.

'Halloa! You here?' cried Theo, in great surprise. 'How did you find us out?'

'Through my sister,' said Eustace. 'We

want a little talk with you, Moore. Private, please.'

He lifted his hat to the woman, bowed, and turned aside, in waiting.

'All right,' laughed Gertrude. 'I'll trot down home with these flowers for Olive. Don't be long. It's getting dark. Mr. Jack, will you escort me? You cannot both of you want to talk to Theo.'

'Yes, get along, Jack!' said Eustace.

Gertrude gave Theo a last look which might have inspired a log with courage, and began to descend towards the village, never once glancing back. She had seen the hunting-crop in Eustace's hand, though he tried to conceal it, and knew within a little what was coming. Her presence could only hamper Theo, who was quite capable of holding his own in single combat; she had secured him a fair field by removing the second brother; that was all she could do.

'I like fair play, Mr. Jack,' she said, as they plunged downward. She heard a thud close behind as she spoke. There was her swain, on his back, and still slithering, the soles of his boots presented for her inspection. 'You must have nails in your boots for this work,' she said, as she helped him up. 'You're quite sure you haven't hurt yourself. Here, take my hand. Go gently!'

Jack, skewered by his utter helplessness, roasted at a slow fire. He depended on this woman, who had wrecked his sister's happiness, for support at every step. He could not walk without her. And she was kind, considerate, going slowly

because of his infirmity, and encouraging him from time to time with cheerful words. The reflection that this woman with the intimidation of the good, was really immoral, set fire to all his theories and traditions. The bold gaze of the connoisseur suited to her kind, for some magic reason found no hold on her, fell off abashed.

'How's Olive?' he managed to enunciate; but it was surprising how little of the malice and reproach intended came out in the words.

'Not well, I'm afraid. She confided Theo to me for an hour while she went to lie down.'

Jack's imagination gaped at this information, seeking in vain to reconcile it with plain facts in Olive's letter. His companion was a bad woman, he timely bethought him; she was lying.

Nearing the hotel, she left him with a friendly nod, and went up to a quaint figure half-recumbent on a bench outside the door. Jack, hardly crediting his own eyesight, recognized the little Frenchman, whose pugnacity had first dragged the scoundrel Moore within the sphere of vision of the Cumnor family. It seemed this profound deceiver, this sinner in angel guise, could conjure up the past to do her service. The Frenchman, standing hat in hand, received her commands, apparently; for, replacing his hat—a queer one—with a flourish, he set off along the way she had come, passing Jack without a sign of recognition. Jack stood to stare after the man, and, ere he turned again, the woman vanished. He felt alone in the world, deserted, fooled, bedevilled. In disconsolate mood, he envied Theo—Maurice,

too. It was worth a leathering from Eustace. Why did some fellows have all the luck?

Just then a flock of maidens issued from the hotel, to observe the signs of the weather. Hatless and tidy, they stood about in the road, awaiting the call to dinner. Among them, he was conscious rather than saw, was Mary Oldfield. Panic-stricken, he would have retreated; but——

'Jack Cumnor!' she cried in amazement. It was too late. He had been recognized.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE FIGHT IN THE WOODS

Having watched Gertrude disappear in the night of the forest, Theo said:

'I'm glad you've come! Olive has been very queer lately——'

Eustace interrupted with, 'You vile cad!' his face all alight with relief in the decided utterance. 'I am here, at Olive's request, to have it out with you.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Theo was beginning, but just then he caught sight of the hunting-crop, and his moderation vanished. In the manner of a practised duellist, he saw nothing but his opponent's eyes.

'Oh, you don't, don't you? Isn't it bad enough to be related to a cur like you, to have our sister married to you, that you must go and make a public exhibition of yourself with another woman?'

The crop, held straight down beside the hero's right leg, quivered with unmistakable eagerness.

'You've got hold of a precious lie. But your tone's insufferable. Do you want to fight?'

'I don't fight with blackguards. I'm here to give you such a thrashing as you never had in your life!'

Moore evaded the first rush to collar him, and put up his walking-stick. Eustace, careless of hurt, got hold of the stick, rendering it useless, an encumbrance, and struck as best he could at his adversary's back and shoulders. Theo, abandoning the stick, sprang back preparatory to closing with his assailant, but Eustace stuck to him, affording not a second's respite.

Theo's one desire was to throw down his opponent, to plant his knee on him, and pin him down. He opposed not Eustace Cumnor, but incarnate unreason, false claims, senseless tragedy—all that he had fought against so long in Olive. The horror had taken human shape, and was trying to overpower him. Well, so much the better; he had often longed to get a hold on it. In this species of exultation he hardly felt the blows that rained on him, but, with a mighty leap, closed in on Eustace, and contrived to grip him by the throat. He strove to get possession of the crop, but could not. In the course of a fierce struggle Eustace was forced back, inch by inch, across the glade, and in among some brambles, till brought up by a log their growth concealed.

Near throttled and embarrassed by the obstacle, Eustace struggled now for dear life, hacking away wildly with the crop; but compression of his windpipe, and the pounding of no light fist, made defeat the unexpected, the irretrievable, as

a face pressed close to his. He struck the beast blindly on the head, face, neck, aiming always at his back and shoulders, but hitting where he could with might and main. A blow no heavier than its predecessors caught Moore crash on the temple. Down he went like a blessed ninepin, while Eustace, in the shock of that unhoped-for deliverance, sat down plump upon the brambled log.

'Here's a mess!' he soliloquized. 'His own fault for behaving like a damned madman! He was strangling me.'

The victor gnawed his lip with vexation. He had botched the job.

Kneeling beside his foe in the twilight, he saw blood soaking the hair. Of course, in addition to everything else, the ass must needs fall on a stone and cut his head. Eustace looked down upon the havoc wrought, and mopped his forehead. Then with his handkerchief he bandaged the wounded head as best he could. The man was alive, he could feel, and might come to at any minute. The thought intimidating him, he determined to go down to the hotel and send up help. Then, in sudden anger with his own squeamishness in feeling pity at this act of justice, he flung his card upon the prostrate form, having read somewhere that it was the thing to do if you were willing to afford satisfaction to your victim. He (Eustace) was no hand with any weapon but a gun, but he was ready to let the blackguard have a shot or slash at him to atone for his excess in punishment.

As he scrambled down through the forest some one passed him in the semi-darkness, and jabbered words of French, to which he answered, 'Damn you!' His pulse was beating at a feverish rate. On the thin skirts of the forest, whence the village could be seen, some insect bit him, and he swore again. Already lights shone in the windows of some of the chalets.

'What's up?' asked Jack, detaching his person from a small crowd of English standing in the road before a big hotel.

Eustace made laconic report of the combat.

'All his fault,' he said. 'Some one had better go and look after him. He's only stunned.'

'The Frenchman's gone already.'

'What Frenchman?'

'The chap we ragged at Montreux. He's staying here.'

'Well, who told him to go? You, Jack? You've not been blabbing?'

'No; it was that woman. She smelt a rat. . . . But I say, old man, I'm devilish sorry this has happened.'

'Yes, I know it's awkward for you. There's Mary Oldfield. . . .'

'I don't mean that—you know! It's for the man himself. He wasn't altogether a bad sort, only a bit of an outsider.'

'How about Olive's letter?'

'Oh, I dare say she piled it on. Indeed, I've heard as much already from the talk here. He may have deserved something, but not this.'

'You needn't rub it in. Did I mean to give him "this," as you call it? He's only stunned, I tell you; and that's his fault for strangling me; I couldn't see what I was up to. He has his deserts.'

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE CATASTROPHE

A PULSE of pain in the head, and sick dilation and contraction of the sphere of vision, were first among Theo's impressions of returning life. Slowly the trouble approached articulating, like the clamour of a multitude. The sense of physical pain decreased in proportion as his mind bit hard on suffering. Incapable of a plan, all sentient, he found pure tragedy, the despair which had often assailed him in scenes with Olive, and been sternly repelled. She, his wife, mad at her failure to make him see with the eyes of her distempered fancy, had struck down her physician. Conscience acquitted him of any wrong to her other than the sternness required to keep his own head clear. Remembering how near he had come to overthrowing Eustace, he wondered how it chanced that he had missed the victory.

The sky was troubled between day and night. He awoke to the discomfort of lying there on his back, felt the ache of a stone at his shoulder, and sat up, wincing. The gloom of the woods had deepened since he saw it last. The pine-

shafts, even those quite near him, were become faint shadows.

'At last I find thee,' cried the voice of Paul. 'How goes it? Drink a little from this flask. It is cognac—good to steady the nerves. Rest against me—so! Now listen. Within this hour I bear thy challenge to that cursed assassin, giving a rendezvous somewhere on the frontier; I then go, and, at any cost, retain a carriage, in the which we descend this night to the plain, thou and I. After two days—the time to compose thy mind—the meeting will take place.'

Theo nodded his acquiescence in these arrangements. But a little later, as he limped down the dark steep path through the forest, leaning on Paul's shoulder, he remembered Olive's complicity with sudden horror. He beheld a hideous tragedy, enough to glut and sicken the ugly fiend possessing her, and said:

'I refuse to fight. There will be no duel.'

'What!' screamed Paul, slipping from Theo's grasp as if it burnt him. 'Allow that butcher, that brute aristocrat, to go unpunished, to boast of his bad work? It is too vile, too tame; it is to avoid conclusions. For whole nations wronged, insulted, it might pass; but touch at the individual, you touch God! The blasphemy must be silenced in a shriek of tragedy. There must be a conclusion. Courage, my soul! Thou art strong with either weapon.'

'I shall not fight,' said Theo doggedly, made stupid by a growth of pain at his forehead.

'Wilt thou bear the insult, the infamy, the scorn of all?'

Paul Tessier drew himself up to his full height, emitted the one word 'Lache!' and with the back of his hand struck his friend on the mouth.

With a smothered exclamation like a sob, Theo moved on alone down the rough path. Half blind, he stumbled perilously. Paul sprang after him, caught him in his arms, and kissed him full on the mouth so lately smitten, while he blubbered:

'It is my love for thee. Thou art no coward, my heart knows that. But that the world should call thee so!'

'Reflect, it was my wife that struck me. The man, the brother, was a simple agent.'

'That changes somewhat the aspect of affairs. Yet, in thy place, I should challenge him. A brother-in-law—a savage beast!'

'I can't go to the hotel. I want to leave the place at once—to bury myself somewhere, quite alone.'

'Come to Madame Gertrude and consult with her.'

'I will; a moment. Do thou meanwhile procure a carriage to take me out of this hole into pure air.'

In the street of the village Paul turned down the brim of Theo's soft felt hat so as to hide the bandage. But the precaution was scarce needed, for, with the exception of a few callous peasants, no one stirred abroad. It was dinner-hour at the hotels. Presently Gertrude met them, anxious

and seeming hurried. On a pressure of her hand by Paul she turned and walked beside them, saying nothing.

'There is thy baggage at the hotel,' said Paul in a business-like way, judging this the best method of enlightening Gertrude.

'Let it remain there,' said Theo listlessly; 'I have done with all that.'

'Madame,' said Paul, as one submitting a hopeless case to higher judgment, 'is he not impossible, this handsome youth? Behold! such as you see him, he has been insulted, beaten to the ground, and left for dead, without a cause, unpardonably. Hold! here is the carte-de-visite which I found beside him. There is a trace of honour in that. Yet he will not fight. He renounces the loud ending, the crash imperative; he declines the effort necessary to obliterate the hateful picture. He will not fight; he runs away, yet is his motive not precisely cowardice. What can one do? It is desolating!'

The white heat of Paul's low-spoken words caught Gertrude's blood, but she controlled her voice to say calmly:

'Why won't you fight, Theo? You would feel much better if you fought him fairly.'

'What a woman!' cried Paul rapturously, as he left them to do Theo's will with regard to a carriage.

'I can't. It would make a tragedy of what, so long as confined to myself, is only farcical. It isn't as if my amiable brother-in-law stood alone. He did what he came to do at Olive's bidding.'

'I can't believe that, Theo.'

'He told me so point-blank. He had her letter on him, his credentials. I don't believe he ever told a lie.'

'I should suspect that foolish servant.'

'No, it was Olive's self; he was quite explicit.'

Hearing him talk thus, Gertrude could at that moment have seen his wife torn in two with composure and some satisfaction. Charity she had none just now; that virtue, together with hope and fear and wholesome caution, was absorbed and lost in her throbbing love for Theo.

'Are you much hurt?' she asked, in a voice quite new.

'Just a broken head,' he answered with perfect indifference.

'Come into my hotel and have a wash. They're still at dinner.'

'No, thanks. I'll walk about in the dusk till that carriage is ready. There'll be a moon later on, worse luck. There's a lot of light even now. Why can't it be quite dark, just for once in a life?'

'Don't take it so much to heart, for my sake, Theo!'

'I can't help it. All's lost; I'm desperate.'

'Not all. I'm with you. You won't leave me?'

'I must really go.'

'And I with you?'

'Not if you value your good name!'

'That's lost already. Theo, can't you see? She has outraged me in you. It wasn't for your

own honour's sake Paul wanted you to fight, so much as to avenge mine. We're one!'

Theo, forced to contemplate a new aspect of the calamity, thought nothing mattered any more. Even his true love for the woman wooing him was for the time in abeyance. She was simply a would-be comforter, whom he suffered for great need of comfort.

Paul came hurrying to bid his friend walk out beyond the last chalet, where the carriage was in waiting. The precaution was of his own thought, to avoid all noise of the departure. The three walked together down the long dim road.

'How many horses?' asked Gertrude, first to break the silence.

'Two, madame.'

'How far can we venture to go with two horses?'

'To the ends of the earth, for reason given in the shape of pourboire. The peasant who drives shows the claw of a bird of prey when one speaks of money.' Paul added in a low tone: 'But madame is not going!'

'He is all to me, and he is without hope. What can I do but accompany him?'

Paul made the mouth of a whistler, but no sound escaped him. It was not in his code of morals to oppose an amorous adventure made by adults. And at least, since there was to be no duel, here was somewhat to set the bourgeois gaping, the note of exclamation proper to a phrase so violent. Gallantly he kissed the lady's hand as he helped her to a seat in the carriage. Theo demurred feebly, calling upon Paul to dissuade

her. Then, as she caught his hand in both her own and pressed it, he fell as silent as if she had stopped his mouth, while a delicious sense of dependence stole upon him.

'We've neither of us got a scrap of luggage. What fun!' she cried, in the voice of childhood.

Theo succumbed completely to the charm of her, and felt strangely happy as the horses trotted steadily down the winding road, the bells on their harness ringing through the forest, over black gorges, round the foot of sleeping pastures. The moon came up among the peaks to eastward, presenting a world in black and white, minute and monstrous. Large squares of pasture set in forest looked like spread white cloths. Illumined clouds as light as cobwebs sailed close to the mountain crests, and seemed to brush them, to get caught there.

Gertrude coaxed Theo to sleep, his head on her breast; but he could not, the fierce exultation of her sacrifice passing by that contact from her to him. Both felt the stress of happiness, burning, dazzling, a conflagration, where they had looked for darkness. And Theo felt nothing beyond; but Gertrude saw the bounds of this illicit joy, the gulf to come, the penalty; and yet gave herself freely for his sake.

'I should have killed myself, I think, to-night. I was mad and should be so still if it weren't for you,' he said once; and she asked no more of Earth or Heaven.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### OLIVIA SUFFERS

Olive did not know that her brothers had arrived until she met them at dinner, Emily, obedient to Mr. Eustace, having kept the secret. She was more dismayed than pleased at first to find them seated at the long table. From divers grimaces she saw exchanged between persons of her acquaintance she gathered that their appearance was regarded as unnecessary and somehow ominous. She caught glances, directed on herself, of dislike mixed with some contempt, which made her in self-defence seem charmed to see them. Eustace sat grimly silent, eating little. Jack, on the other hand, near Mary Oldfield, appeared to enjoy the meal.

'What has become of your husband, Mrs. Moore?' asked an American lady, leaning forth, head and bust, from the rank, like the hammer of a pianoforte when its note is pressed.

'I can't imagine! He went out after tea with Mrs. Elphinstone. They must have got lost together,' said Olive sweetly.

Eustace gave one gulp. Jack blushed hotly, to the staring admiration of his divinity, who wondered what in the world had come to him.

'They're both to be trusted, I think,' said Lady Pettigrew summarily, from the head of the table, glancing contempt at Olive, with whose silliness she had no patience. Was the girl wishing to figure as a martyr in the eyes of those dangerously stupid stepbrothers of hers? 'Monsieur Tessier, too, is missing. I expect he's with them.'

'You see what sort of a time I'm having,' said Olive to Eustace when they rose from table. He took her arm in a paternal manner, and led her out of doors. She breathed deep of the cool air. 'It's a perfect nightmare,' she said.

Eustace put a light to his pipe, screening the match with both hands, which, with his face, appeared in strong relief a moment, then vanished, leaving a small red glow which Olive watched listlessly.

After a succession of puffs, he said:

'It may be some comfort to you to know that I've thrashed that beast within an inch of his life.'

'Who? When?'

'Moore, on the strength of your letter. Directly I arrived; just now, in fact. Jack says the little Frenchman's looking after him.'

Olive went back into the house. The tremendous nature of the catastrophe stilled her nerves, enabling her to see things clearly. It was her doing. Eustace was not to blame, and Theo knew that it was her doing. She could not, for very shame, fly to him as she longed to do. She could neither ask nor expect him to hear her. But the call for confession, self-humiliation, was imperative.

Gertrude appeared to her, white and dazzling, first as judge, then mediator. At that moment her thoughts clung supplicating to Gertrude, who was so strong, so helpful.

Without a word to Emily, who, beholding her set face, fawned on her for tidings, Olive put on a lace mantilla and went to Gertrude's hotel.

Inquiring for Mrs. Elphinstone, she was told she had not come in. A French gentleman had settled the account of madame, and directed that her luggage should be sent to her on demand. The hotel-keeper did not hide his opinion that the affair looked ugly. If aught untoward had befallen a lady so gracious, an inmate of his hotel, he would be for ever desolate.

Hurrying back down the sparsely lighted village street, with care to shun the laughing groups of promenaders, Olive passed a figure, which she knew the minute after for Monsieur Tessier. She turned and called him softly. He came back to her, hat in hand.

'Madame?'

'Tell me all that has happened.'

Paul described the plight in which he had discovered Theo, and outlined the subsequent course of events, hiding only, with excusable duplicity, his inward applause at the elopement. His studied politeness made her hateful in her own eyes.

'You also hate me!'

'Madame is deceived. Am I the judge? Madame doubtless found reasons sufficient for invoking her brother. She wished perhaps to disembarrass herself of a detested husband, who,

I would beg madame to remember, is my intimate friend. It is natural that I cannot see with her eyes.'

'Oh!' gasped Olive, clenching teeth and hands, aching in every limb with the effort at self-control. She walked on, seeing nothing, yet vaguely conscious of direction. Soon she diverged from the road, drawn towards a certain ravine she recalled vividly, moved rather than moving, as one walks in sleep. She craved an abyss unfathomable wherein to fling her griefs, and cease to be.

'Permit me, dear madame; this is not your road. Accept my arm. It is so dark that one strays easily.'

It was yet more dark for her.

'Leave me! Let me alone!' cried Olive, furious. 'Why will you, why will every one, pursue me, persecute me? Oh, there is no God!' The words found hideous echo in the cliffs across the valley; it seemed those unseen rocks would never end their muttering. Olive glanced round apprehensively, then fell to hard sobbing, without a tear.

Paul answered: 'I have no certitude whether there be or no, not being a theologian. But so loud an assertion belies itself; it rings too much of defiance. It is certain there is much we comprehend not. Take my arm, madame!'

She no longer resisted, but kept sobbing loudly, and with her sobs came words of which her guide made nothing.

'What's the matter? Mrs. Moore! Olive. . . . Monsieur Tessier, what has happened to her?'

The evening group outside the door of the

hotel pressed round them, horror-stricken, questioning. But Paul passed through their midst without answering them, tenderly supporting Olive, who had lost outward consciousness. Emily came to relieve him, and, with an arm round her mistress, led her up the stairs.

Paul, going out again, informed the gossips briefly what had happened Then he strode up the village street to the first café. Approaching with the thought of stimulants, he saw Eustace Cumnor seated with his brother at one of the small round tables which adorned a sort of terrace between oleanders grown in boxes. On a sudden furious impulse he went up to them and flung in the elder's face every insult he could frame in English, calling him 'hog' and 'bug,' and other evil names. Having said, as he thought, enough to secure a challenge, he calmly waited for it.

'Why, what the dickens is up now, mooshoo?' said Eustace, good-humouredly deprecating. He looked to Jack for an explanation.

'Theess eez op!' said Paul, with great distinctness. 'You have keelled your sisterre!'

'Good God!'

Eustace sprang to his feet on the instant, and so did Jack. Paul, with satisfaction, watched them stride off towards the hotel, where their presence was needed.

That night he paid his bill, and the next morning early set out on foot for Bex, *en route* for Paris, where his work lay.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### MARTYRDOM OF A MORALIST

The community of English summer visitors in the little Alpine village experienced a thrill of horror at the drama enacted in their midst, but did not venture to express that horror above a whisper till they saw it confirmed in the strong lined face of Lady Pettigrew. Then it went forth as a shout, a call to arms. Her ladyship commanded the landlord of the hotel—a burly, prosperous boor, never seen without his hat—to eject the Cumnors, painting their criminality in the liveliest colours. The spiritless wretch but grinned and scratched his ear.

Turning from him in disgust, she had an interview with Eustace, in which she bore herself with scorching correctness.

'Leave the place at once, and give us back pure air,' was the burden of her charge to him. He stoutly maintained that he had done no more than any decent man would do at the call of a favourite sister, and regretted his inability to oblige Lady Pettigrew by a sudden departure. Olive was too ill to be moved; and he must wait a day or two in case that villain chose to demand satisfaction. That was the nearest he came to confessing he

had done aught amiss. Altogether he held his own throughout the interview, increasing her indignation against him. On Jack, his henchman, she did not think it worth her while to fulminate. She warned them both they would be boycotted, and from thenceforth failed to descry them.

Eustace cared not a rap; but it was hard for Jack, who, magnetically attached to the petticoats of Mary Oldfield, writhed under the shafts of her high disdain, and the sarcasms shot at him out of her talk with others.

Pitiless hopes were expressed that Olive would soon get well, that the hotel might be quit of a race whose stay polluted it. One lady, an American of wide experience, told of the superior gallantry of the French, how the gentlemen at an hotel she knew of in the Cevennes, in order to relieve the ladies of an offensive person, had challenged him, one after another, to mortal combat. The narrative reflected on the personal courage of Colonel Oldfield and other Englishmen in company, but failed to rouse their emulation. It was rumoured at first, then positively averred, that Monsieur Tessier had, previous to his departure, grossly insulted Eustace Cumnor to provoke him to fight, and failing to do so, had been so disappointed that he went straight home. The valiant Frenchman! Cowardice, as well as brutality, was thus ascribed to Eustace, who enjoyed, notwithstanding, the success of a lion among ladies. They ran from him in fear, respected his grimness. Upon Jack rained the deluge of their contempt and lothing. They

dubbed him 'jackal,' and were never tired of mentioning that lower animal in his hearing, with information on its habits, purporting to be derived from works of reference. He tried hard to get Mary alone, but she fled as from the plague.

Coming out very early one morning after a sleepless night, he found a row of maidens in light marching order, armed with every variety of alpenstock, leaning against the wooden fence opposite the hotel, and watching an upper window, evidently bound on a long excursion, and awaiting some lag-abed. His cruel charmer was among them, looking straight at him, and coldly smiling.

'The jackal prowls anear!' said one of her companions warningly.

'Mr. Jack Cumnor!' called Mary in her full, sweet voice. 'Come here!' It was the first time in five long hopeless days that she had thrown him a word, good or bad. 'I want to know how you and your brother justify your conduct in remaining where you aren't wanted. Olive's ill, I know; but she's quite well enough to be moved comfortably, and she'd be better anywhere than here. Haven't you done enough mischief? Or does your brother mean to try his strength on some one else? None of us who have a man for friend feel safe while he's about.'

'I can stand a good deal of chaff on my own account—any amount—all you like,' said Jack with dignity, 'but I shall be glad if you'll kindly leave my brother out of it. He's the best chap ever lived. He only did what any honest man would have done in the same case.'

A titter from the line of girls failed to disconcert him.

'These animals have their points,' was murmured tolerantly.

'My brother,' Jack continued forcefully, feeling the occasion to be of those rare and solemn ones when plain speech to ladies is permissible, 'did only what any man would have done, whose sister's husband was misconducting himself with another woman before her face.'

'That sounds a little intricate,' said Mary kindly. 'Let me see: "His sister's husband"—what was it?—"with another woman." And "before her face." Whose face?'

'Olive's,' said Jack flatly. There was a general laugh.

'What happened before Olive's face?'

'Oh, nothing!' snapped the moralist, colouring hotly. If it had not been to destroy his only faith in life, he could have fancied she spoke unmaidenly.

'That other woman is my friend, Mr. Jack. And I like your brother-in-law, too, extremely. Will you take my word when I tell you that there was nothing whatever between them beyond the intimacy natural to such very old friends, and that your sister was entirely to blame for being absurdly, insufferably jealous?'

'I'd take your word, of course,' stammered Jack uneasily, and could get no further, though he appeared by no means to have uttered all he had to say.

'Then does it not at once follow that you and

your brother, by coming here, have done a great wrong—to Olive, quite as much as to her husband and that other woman, whom you have very likely driven into the "misconduct" you spoke of just now.'

Jack's whole soul revolted from the hideous indelicacy of such a reference on the lips of his divinity. The very thought should have no existence in the mind of a maiden.

'I don't blame them,' she added. 'I'm sure I should "misconduct" myself on the like provocation.'

'I should,' came in chorus from the line of girls,

The moralist longed to stuff his ears and run, until his legs tired, away from them. It was blasphemy in the very sanctuary, from the mouth of the priestess.

'You must be singularly perfect yourself, Mr. Jack Cumnor, to be so hard on others.'

Mary's eyes were bent on him, their calm gaze tugging at his secret soul. He lost whatever of composure he had till then preserved. 'No better than the majority—all sinners—slip occasionally. Marriage—love of a pure woman—keeps men straight,' were among the phrases which escaped like steam from his inward ferment. The merriment of those other girls was too abominable. Imploringly he fixed his eyes on Mary's face, which was pensive, far from smiling.

'I understand you to say that you are not wholly without sin.' She smiled a little at the point of her alpenstock, which was tracing

mystic characters in the roadside dust. 'Come, that's something. . . . Am I a pure woman, Mr. Cumnor?'

Jack scorned reply. His heart had jumped into his head, and fluttered there, trying hard to burst it.

'Because if you found out your brother-in-law and that "other woman," and said to them humbly, "I'm sorry," I think I should like you very much indeed.' Upon that she moved off with her friends, who kept looking back, as they went, to see how he was feeling.

'She knows a lot,' was the moralist's first reflection; but he remembered, in excuse for her, that she had lost her mother. A girl could hardly have lived so long *tête-à-tête* with that knowing old dog of a colonel without catching hints of matters which concern the male. He would have been elated by her promise to love him, but for the condition attached to the promise. He had no money, and Eustace refused to provide him for such a purpose. It was tantalizing, and he spent a doleful day. But in the evening Maurice arrived post-haste with orders from Sandset, and Jack unexpectedly obtained his chance.

After vituperating his elder brothers for a couple of wild asses, Maurice stated his commission to take Olive home at once, and that done, to set out in pursuit of the fugitives. 'Though I can ill spare the time, as you know. You ought to relieve me of the second journey, Eustace. You've got no work calling you; and you owe them both an apology.'

'I owe them nothing. I stayed here prepared to fight him, though I'm no good with sword or pistol. He's gone off with the woman; that justifies me.'

'There may be no harm even now. I know "the woman," as you call her, intimately.'

'Guess you do!' sneered Eustace; 'and, of course, you're wild about it!'

'It means a set-back to my practice if I have to run about Europe in search of those two. And some one ought to go. The Squire insists on it.'

'I knew you'd been working up the Squire against us. . . . Send Jack, then. He's keen on it. He's been plaguing me all day to give him money for that very purpose.'

'I'll be off like a shot,' put in Jack eagerly.

So it was arranged. Jack approached Miss Oldfield after dinner, and asked if she had truly meant her words that morning.

'Go anyhow,' she said, 'if you value the chance I offered. And mind, no "slips" by the way, Mr. Jack!'

'I wish she wouldn't talk like that,' he thought, with teeth on edge; but shortly brightened, conceiving how a girl might harp on doubtful topics, for their novelty, from sheer force of innocence.

# CHAPTER XXX

## THE HONEYMOON

Gertrude, who had always thought of herself as rather cold and unemotional, endured the tremors of a shy young bride, sustained only by the love in her companion's eyes. At the glance of others she blushed, and felt ashamed. Even the peasant-women at work among the vineyards, whose smile of the flashing teeth was a general indulgence, were hardly to be faced without him. And even he was no longer the same. The mystery of the lover clothing him concealed her friend of old, and made him wonderful. The *mythos* of the girl who loved a man and, yielding to him, as she imagined, found a god in his disguise, appropriated itself to her. She was conscious of the man without there, sorrowing, all the while that she lay dreamy in the god's embrace. She clasped a lovely stranger.

Beside the mistress of Italian lakes, where came few tourists in the blue-hot summer weather, they had found a small hotel, discreet and modest; and there together led a life unreal, eyes aching with too bright a radiance, hearts aching with excess of happiness. Such completeness of joy appalled Gertrude, for at the moment of yielding

she had anticipated none to speak of, having no light upon the secret paths of love except her own experience in marriage. It so enhanced and magnified her guilt that no life seemed long enough in which to expiate it. She gave herself up to the rapture with a sob half choked. The past was dead, she herself had slain it; the future yet unborn, would it ever be?

But, while the opiate slumber gained on her, she had the anguish to perceive that Theo was awaking from it. As they lounged in a boat on the lake, adrift in sunlight, between two fairy banks, one brown, one purple, his face was turned from her, and she knew that it was frowning in grave thought. And at evening when they strolled beneath the plane-trees by the shore, she knew his mind strayed from her by his silence, and the eagerness with which, awaking out of it, he pressed her arm or breathed some word of love.

Her perceptions were remorseless, pitiless, despite the enchanted sleep of half her being. It was as if a person, too content to move, should watch a snake draw near with hissing head. Misgivings were long in overpowering the fatalism of a self-surrender so entire as hers. Her superb healthiness for long held conscience down in Theo as in herself; but when his reason began to reassert itself, she felt disheartened and her powers relaxed. With the first headache trooped distressing thoughts; Harry, Olive, the world and its opinion, appeared life-size before her; Theo had alone seemed human, sentient,

through all those sun-blind hours since they were one. And among them came the Theo of old days, her friend and comrade, but her friend no longer. Had she not, in love, betrayed him? To keep him here with her in dalliance, however pleasant—was it not precisely to encourage that fatalistic bent of his which she had, all her life long, tried to extirpate? And what was the future like, did he remain with her? Wherever English people resorted, they would be pariahs; he would be disqualified from all employment save the lowest, and must relinquish every hope of a career. Obliged to idle abroad, chiefly on her means, he would become enervated, fit for nothing.

In this mood of remembrance she observed him closely, and, marking how he shunned all talk of the past, knew that the Gertrude of old days was present with him. Their thoughts were german, as was only natural, for by culture and association they had worlds in common. The present physical happiness seemed to insult their past, making it frown on them. Would a lawful, hallowed union have done the same? she asked herself, and believed that it would, in some measure.

'A penny for your thoughts!' she said to Theo, as they sat on a low wall, resting in their evening walk. Below their perch, dusty vineyards fell in steps to the lake, on which a few sails advanced solemnly, like church banners. The waters were a-blush just then; the hills around were turned to rolling cloud of every hue, from darkest blue

to softest amethyst. In Gertrude's mind the landscape figured her existence of these days, too beautiful to last, a joy to weep on.

'Your thoughts?' she said a second time, as he had not answered.

'I was thinking of a multitude of things,' he confessed, laughing to reassure her, without, however, dispelling the look of preoccupation which had provoked her to make the bid. 'I was thinking about money matters, for one thing. There's a sort of cowardice in shirking a settlement which must be made sooner or later; and it's unfair to other people.'

'For some weeks I forgot that there were "other people" in the world.' She purposely picked out the words reminiscent of Olive.

'So did I.'

'And these "other people" are troubling you now?'

'A little, necessarily.'

Once upon a time, before the crash, he had used to tell her everything; now he told only what he thought would please her. It came of delicacy, the wish to spare her feelings by treating their life together as the whole of life; and had root in gratitude and a new tenderness. Yet it hurt her as a thing he would not once have done.

'Well, they've been troubling me too, Theo—not a little! So much, indeed, that I'm going to make a strange request of you—to let me go. I know it seems cruel, mean of me, but I feel I must. You know what our guardian used to tell

us: "Keep swimming or you sink" .... I've not tried these last weeks; I've been sinking, dragging you with me.'

Theo caught at her hands, but she withdrew them, checking his approaches with a steady look.

'I mean it, Theo.'

His distress wrung her nerves without affecting her heart and its growing purpose. The idea had come to her a moment since, and the more she revolved it in her mind, the more did she admire its keen retributive beauty. She adored Theo for not harping then upon his own loss, though she could see that he was struck down by the blow.

'Where can you go alone? You must let me stand by you.'

'No.'

His despair was very great; but when once convinced of her sincerity, he hid it as best he could; and she even fancied she could detect in his tone towards her some faint shadow of relief. On that last night together, they were once more able to talk freely of old times.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### AGAIN THE GOOD ANGEL

THREE days later Gertrude reached London, having broken her journey at Paris to consult Paul Tessier. On hearing her news, Paul had at once volunteered to join Theo. He had long desired to travel Eastward, he assured her, and could devote a whole year to consolation of their friend, should need appear. He asked but the time to settle up outstanding matters of business—a few hours. Leaving him had been the final wrench away from Theo; the world had grown visibly darker, never to light again.

The porter was not in the hall, and, rejecting the lift, she toiled up the bare stone staircase spiritlessly, flight by flight. Entering her flat, she was surprised to see a light in the drawing-room, of which the door stood ajar. In haste to learn the cause of this phenomenon, she discovered her husband asleep in an arm-chair. His head hung uncomfortably, the lips parted, the face discoloured and seeming swollen. His breathing was stertorous. She remembered to have given him her second latchkey at parting, with a charge to look after her effects from time to time. Memories old, long buried, rose menacing in

their grave-clothes, as she detected a certain odour in the room, and knew that he had fallen a prey to old habit. She put a cushion for his head, and made him lie more comfortably; then, having removed her hat and jacket, turned down the gas a little and sat near him, waiting, in the matter-of-fact manner of a trained nurse entering upon new duties.

At length Harry moved his head and groaned a little. Instantly she knelt beside him. 'Gertrude!' he articulated with difficulty, but she did not believe that he recognized her. He snored again. An hour later he was wide awake, and talking wildly, quite unconscious of her presence. Her voice, which alone had been enough to soothe him formerly, now had no power over him, seemed rather to exacerbate his inward wrangling. She had lost that strength of purity which had been hers, and the devil in her husband knew it; herein she ate the first-fruits of her fall. He stood up and staggered across the room to a cabinet with glass doors, reserved for cherished knick-knacks. As he fumbled with the fastening, she opened for him, when, by dint of groping, he produced a medicine-bottle and a wine-glass, and proceeded with shaky hands to help himself. She tilted the glass carefully as he set it down, so as to spill half the contents on her carpet. He, unobservant, drank what was left, and, with a groan of satisfaction, tottered back to his chair. Gertrude, having hidden the bottle, put on her outdoor clothes and went in search of the physician who was used to attend him.

It was then between eleven o'clock and midnight. She had to walk some distance before meeting a cab; the doctor must be roused, and there were other delays, so that it was nearly two in the morning before she returned with the advice needed. Harry was awake again and stumbling about the room, using frightful language. She heard the fall of something, and as she entered the room, her husband lunged at her furiously with intent to strike. The doctor dragged her aside, whispering: 'Bring me that bottle you say you hid from him.'

She obeyed, and he thanked her, smiling, as for a common civility. Harry ceased to storm at sight of the bottle, intent on it immediately with sheer animal greed. The dose administered, and the patient no longer troublesome, the doctor said:

'It's that to death, or Bedlam. It can't take long either way. I told you five years ago when you first took charge of the case that a relapse would be fatal. He knew that himself, poor fellow; spoke of it when last we met—let me see, that must be six months ago. How long has he been at it?'

'I don't know. I returned at seven o'clock last evening and found him here, in my drawing-room, asleep like this.'

'Your having been away accounts for it. He missed your support. I have often quoted the case as one of hypnotism, animal magnetism, or whatever you choose to call it.'

'It is my fault, anyhow. I wilfully disap-

pointed him. I went abroad for six weeks and stayed four months, and have been careless about writing.'

'Don't blame yourself too much. Since that fever out in Burma he has never been a healthy subject.'

'Ought he to go to bed?'

'Certainly not. We've got to get him away. Now I'm here I'll stop till morning, if you'll allow me; and you go and send a telegram for me. It will do you good to get out for a minute, if you're not too tired. Your district office is open all night. We must have a man-nurse on the scene as soon as possible.'

She was glad of the errand, and derived some fortitude from the icy breath of the streets, then at its cleanest, and free from the taint of man. It helped to the dispassionate view of tribulations, by which alone she could hope to preserve her senses. Having performed her commission, she did not go straight home, but walked for an hour briskly in the void main thoroughfares.

When she returned, the doctor slept outstretched upon a sofa in the room with Harry. After listening to their diverse breathing for a while disconsolately, she went to the window, and, lifting up a corner of the blind, looked out. The grey of the town below was turning to violet; the sky eastward had the colour of a passion-flower; belfries and one or two high chimneys, projecting from the frozen surge of roofs, pierced through the thick bloom rather than mist which overlay them. A mourning outlook, differing

from remembered dawns in Italy, as the scene in the room behind her differed from the pulsing joy of life with Theo.

As soon as it was light she sat down and wrote to all of Harry's relations whose whereabouts she knew, some being friends, some enemies of her own. Mr. Gravesey was the only one of them all whose presence she desired. She also wrote to her servant, announcing her return. The doctor went, and after an interval of an hour, which seemed a lifetime, a trained attendant came and relieved her of responsibility. Harry was removed that afternoon without publicity.

Jane, her maidservant, came back to work next day, and Gertrude resumed the old life, but with what a difference! In those rooms it was impossible to escape the thought of Harry; she missed him hourly, with grief. Mr. Gravesey wrote word that he was ill in bed, so could not come to her. She had no friends now, so could expect no visitors.

Worst of all, there being nothing left for her to do, she had constantly to wrestle with a sense of guilt, which would have meant moral ruin had she allowed it hold on her. She heard whispers: nothing mattered any more, there was no hope for her, she was bad irrevocably, and might as well discard all good intent, since it could not avail her. Her frail purpose was the sport of adverse waves, and it seemed that each, as it towered above her, must be the last. She felt great longing to fly back to Theo—even, at times, to take refuge with any man who might be

generous enough to accept a charge so worthless. Even religion shed no light on her; or, if it shone at all, the ray was pitiless. She had sinned with open eyes, and so must abide the punishment.

Amid these struggles she was surprised and not much pleased to receive a visit of politeness from James Warne. He tried to behave as if nothing much had occurred in the interval since their last meeting, but betrayed embarrassment at each elbow. Without referring directly to her elopement, he managed by circumlocutions to justify it, and convey to her the assurance of his undiminished regard. He even, in an impersonal way, declared his love for her, and offered her a protection, the measure of which he chose not to define. She was not angered, scarcely so much as hurt, by his proposal; she had become so worthless in her own eyes; but it pointed to the visible stain on her in a way intolerable, and she clenched teeth and hands in the effort not to give way.

The growing conviction, between hope and fear, that her brief union with Theo would not be fruitless, made it still more imperative that she should resist the gloom which threatened her. She needed advice and comfort, not of the James Warne kind, which blinked plain facts, but a voice that, while condemning, should teach hope. But she knew not where to turn for such advice, and wandered at a loss for guidance, when it came to her from the quarter least expected.

At dusk of a December evening, as she sat musing in the firelight, 'Mr. Cumnor' was announced. Maurice came in precisely as of old, and, after shaking hands, took stand upon the hearthrug with his back to the blaze, and studied her appearance critically. Silent so long as the maid remained in the room, the moment she was gone he broke out:

'Well, I hope you're proud of yourself!'

She gave one look, then kept her eyes downcast, while her whole demeanour cried: In pity, scourge me! That tone of withering scorn was exactly what she craved, but could not give herself. He portrayed the havoc she had wrought, sparing no detail that could make her wince, and himself feasted on her speechless anguish, watched each convulsive movement of her hands with greed.

Olive had been near to death, he told her, but was now, happily, convalescent—the shadow of what she had been, and, wonderful to relate, quite mild and sensible.

'You'd be sorry for what you've done if you could see her. . . . She won't hear of a judicial separation, much less of a divorce, though the latter course has been urged upon her by her father, mother, Eustace, myself, everybody. She sticks up for you, of all people, against her whole family, declaring it was all her fault, which it decidedly was not. She has even expressed a wish to see you, but naturally that cannot be. My wife, too, in the goodness of her heart, would have rushed here if I hadn't forbidden it. The

porter of these flats had orders to let me know if you came back, because we wish to ascertain the whereabouts of Moore. Jack went after you both with an apology. (I thought, imagining that I knew you, there might yet be time to prevent the great catastrophe, which, for me, was the destruction of an idol I had deliberately set up.) But he missed the trail somehow, and has been rocketing across Europe, wasting other people's money. He won't come home because Miss Oldfield made him some delectable promise conditional on his finding Moore. You see, you both had friends if you'd only waited.'

She named the place on the Lago Maggiore where she had left Theo. Closing his pocket-book, he continued:

'I suppose you can reconcile what has happened with your religion, honour, and all that, though it has disgusted me more than ever with the whole bag of tricks. You gave yourself out for such a pattern of holiness. . . .'

'I never meant to.'

The interruption was scarce audible, but her deigning to make an answer at all surprised Maurice. It told him what he had not till then suspected, that she was taking his grand tirade in deadly earnest. He stared hard at her with a new curiosity.

'Look here!'—he changed his tone abruptly—'you Christians enjoy privileges of consolation denied to the rest of mankind. I suppose confession and absolution figure somehow in your

belief. Now you're in trouble, why not have recourse to some discreet and learned minister? Or have you discarded . . . ?'

'I have meant to, I have tried,' she moaned. 'I even went into a church, but couldn't—— Oh, I couldn't—to such a boy!'

She was scared by his going into fits of laughter.

As soon as his mirth subsided, he remarked:

'You won't stop on here, I suppose? You might let me know your choice, when made, of a retreat. I still feel a mournful interest, though your unlooked-for aberration has robbed me of all that made life valuable. To mark my disillusionment, I'm "taking silk." Ah, madam, you have much to answer for. I used to think you exempt from human frailties; and as for poor old Bella, why, you know she worshipped! You should have seen her terror—there's no other word for it—when the sad news reached us.'

Seeing all at once, to his dismay, that tears were brewing, he broke off abruptly and left her without farewell. She had altogether failed to see the joke in his assumed self-righteousness, had been stupid throughout the interview. Were all women alike at seasons of emotion, flaccid to the point of humour?

During his last apostrophe he had been doing something with a pencil in his pocket-book, making a burlesque sketch of her despair, she thought in her abasement, for he was great at caricature. It was only after he had been some time gone that she espied upon the table nearest

her a scrap of paper covered with his neat handwriting:

'Rev. J. L. Cumnor, St. Lawrence Clergy House, Chelsea (close to you)—not a "boy"!—age over seventy, but retains sense of hearing—my relative, but hardly know him—reputed skilled in all kinds of priestcraft.—M. C.'

# CHAPTER XXXII

## THE DESPAIR OF THEODORE

Theo remained three days where Gertrude left him in a confusion that shook the gates of understanding, action and inaction seeming alike made hopeless. The landscape, out of doors, dead bleached and seeming to crumble in the merciless sun, was leprous to him; the gloom indoors oppressed him like a tomb. All the flies in creation seemed to have gathered in the hotel rooms, closely shuttered against the glare. The ground-floor reeked of garlic, and the odour found its way at seasons up the stairs, even into the bedrooms. Worst of all, the curiosity of the landlord and his wife, voracious gossips, to learn the cause of the fair signora's departure, plagued him as mosquitoes plague a man with broken limbs.

Night brought no respite. Its murmur, always human to the mind's ear, sang dirges to him. The moon, the stars, the mystery of lake and further shore, were poor dead faces that had once been fair. They and all else that now dejected him, had a few hours since pulsated with grand life. The reflection turned all nature from a heartless spectator to an armed enemy.

At length one evening as he maundered by the lake-shore, a fresh breeze smote him, and his nerves relaxed. Nature, for a space, renounced hostilities. The sunset had not yet faded, and the moon, nearly full, came up in a lilac twilight; at first but a crown of light to a certain mountain, like the nimbus of a black madonna, then an arc, a hemicycle, a disk above the peak, swung clear at last and hallowing the loves of lake and sky. Theo found delight in the scene, and the pipe between his teeth tasted good to him.

A certain boatman, who had been Gertrude's favourite, called out that it was just the night for a row on the lake. The enigma of the further coast attracted him. A line of intermittent sparks, not yet a path, shed from the moon, led towards it on the water. The shore on which he stood, hotel, and little town were hateful to him. He approached the boatman, who, after animated discussion, agreed to row him to Luino that night for twenty lire.

He then returned to the hotel, informed the landlord of his sudden whim to depart, wrote two letters upon money matters, bought a knapsack, packed in it his few belongings, and directed that any letters which might come for him were to be forwarded to the Poste Restante at Trieste. His intention, though of a fluid kind, was to moon along the base of the Alps to the Austro-Italian seaport, and thence take ship to the Levant. The innkeeper, loud in regret, escorted him to the boat, and whispered something to the boatman, who replied:

'No, no! Reassure yourself!' as he shoved off.

'Do you know what he was saying to me, that rogue?' said the rower, when they were out of earshot. 'He said that you intended to drown yourself, and not only defraud me of my fare, but get me suspected of murder into the bargain. "No, no," said I in my breast, "the signor is known among us; he is honourable. He would not cheat me of my twenty lire. He would pay me that, and a buon mano, before he drowned himself."'

Theo, highly amused, paid his fare forthwith, adding to the sum five lire, which his friend seemed to think mighty little, for he held it up to the moon, and sighed profoundly.

'The water here is very deep,' he remarked, as undesirous to prolong his labour for so small a wage—'so deep that some say it has no bottom, but goes right through the world to a lake on the other side.'

Theo thanked him for the information, but begged him to row on.

'Excuse me, signor! But they told me you had suffered'—the boatman touched his heart theatrically—'and every man knows what that pain is . . . . However, so much the better! To Luino, then!'

And he bent again to his oars, singing: 'Santa Lucia!'

The moon stood over the still breast of the Motterone, and the serried ranks of Alps to north and west seemed a huge foam-tipped breaker

arrested in its curl on Italy, when Theo said good-bye to his boatman at the landing-stage. The little frontier town of Luino slept beside the lake. It was soon behind him, and he stepped out boldly on a clear road, not knowing whither save that he faced eastward. His road kept the level round the foot of great hills, outposts of the mighty host across the plain whose crests and spears kept glittering in the moonlight. To be alone in a deserted land was the one good left to him. He had all his life long been most unfortunate, it appeared to him. His ideals at starting had been discountenanced by a vision of the sordid realities their pursuit involved. He had seen Hell opened in those London riots, and, transported to Turkey, had enjoyed the shade afforded by an ancient despotism, and espoused the fatalism of a people long ago convinced of the intrinsic vanity of human aims. He ought never to have returned to Europe, to the bed of fever; it was simply to harbour fresh illusions, to court discouragement. Now he was off to the land where illusions grow not, where man accepts his destiny with praise to God.

Tired at length, he lay down in the lee of a ruined wall and slept, but not for long, for when he awoke the moon had not yet set. Having eaten some sandwiches out of his knapsack and drunk at a brook hard by, he set forward, refreshed. A road leading upward to vague heights took his wayward fancy, and, just as the moon set, he began to climb. For long it was pitchy

dark, and a chill wind blew, but by and by he was conscious of a lightening. With some labour he clambered up on to a shoulder of the hill his road kept breasting, and saw the Alpine ridges colour to the day across lagoons of mist. A youthful widow warm to life, and blushing in her weeds, the dawn appeared to him. He stood above the fever mist which had distorted vision, looked down on Europe from the prophet's height. Hysterical Europe! Rousseau's dream fulfilled! He was bound for Asia, where the pulse is normal.

Yet, descending from his mount of inspiration, he ate a hearty breakfast at the first hostelry, and for days dawdled on very happily among the foot-hills, meeting with kindness everywhere from the country-people, even after his slender store of money was all spent. Here and there he was able to do a stroke of work in return for a night's lodging; but at the worst he was welcome to a couch of straw in some outhouse, and a breakfast of black bread and grapes and fresh goat's milk. Thus, with boots the worse for wear and shabby raiment, but in high health and spirits, he crossed the frontier into Unredeemed Italy, and came at length to Trieste.

The pavements made him footsore in a trice, and the sight of well-dressed people covered him in shyness. He felt ashamed, on entering the post-office, to trouble a correct official with his plea for letters. There were two for him, it was found, both registered. To obtain them he had to show his passport, and append his signature to certain forms. While yet engaged in these

preliminaries he was assaulted from behind. Turning to get his back against the counter, he beheld Paul Tessier, who cried :

'At last I hold thee! I have called here three times a day for three weeks, and should have returned to Paris long ago in despair, had not the clerk assured me there were letters for thee. I went to thy retreat in Italy; my bird had flown the night before; the landlord named Trieste, so I sped hither. Come to the modest "gasthaus" where I lodge. One of the enemy, Monsieur Jack Cumnor, has been here after thee, sent on from Pallanza, just as I was. He had been to Zurich, Coire, Innspruck, Munich, Baden-Baden, Vienna, God knows where! He hailed me dearest friend, and asked me where you were. I chose, at a venture, Varsovie, in Russian Poland. He went at once, though it grieved him, for he felt attracted by some third-rate singer here. It was adieu, ma belle! and hey for Varsovie! which, as I repeat to thee, great dullard, with my elbow in thy ribs, is situated in Russian Poland. I have dedicated him, as it were, to a remote posterity. He has lost actuality, all concern with the present. I have orders from Madame Gertrude to convey thee to the Orient, and there protect thee. ('À la bonne heure!' interjected Theo.) But, I warn thee, I refuse to stray beyond the immediate environs of big towns, where the gendarme and the consul may be found at need. I fear the brigand, camel, yataghan—all savage beasts! We can start to-morrow if it please thee!'

With Paul gripping his arm in the heat of demonstration, and rolling out such nonsense in his jolly voice, causing people in the streets to turn and stare at them, Theo entered on a new lease of life and saw fun everywhere.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### OLIVIA REGAINS HER HUSBAND

'MOORE'S at Constantinople, hand in glove with a famous French artist. He's doing work for the French Embassy—which is a dirty thing to do, considering we're not very far from war with France; but if anyone tells him of it, he gets rusty and talks of turning Mahometan. Dick says it's a thousand pities our people can't find work for him, because he's really worth his salt, and there are lots of small vice-consulates in Turkey, filled by natives, where an Englishman would do much better, and, given private means, could live like a lord. . . . I cut breakfast, and rode over, knowing your anxiety. Any food going?'

Tony Farrer, in riding trim, burst into the gun-room at Sandset Manor, where Eustace sat smoking, and threw down a letter he had that morning received from his brother in Constantinople.

'I'll send a wire to Jack. He's somewhere in those regions—Buda-Pesth. He'll be glad to see the end of his job, poor beggar. He's been a second Wandering Jew for four months now. Go into the breakfast-room and ring the bell.

They'll bring you what there is. I'll tell the Squire.'

A groom on horseback was dispatched to the nearest telegraph - office, while Eustace held counsel with his father concerning the way in which they should break the news to Olive.

'Leave that to her mother,' said the parent wisely. They had learnt that Olive's chief happiness consisted in remembrance of her errant husband and speculations as to his whereabouts. But this morning's news was so exciting that they could not tell how she might take it. It might disappoint her to know that he was so far away, quite forgetful of her; and she was still far from strong.

As it happened, she was delighted, thankful to be sure he was alive, that some one known to her had seen and spoken to him. Reading for herself Dick Farrer's letter, she laughed merrily at a touch in it: 'When I call him names for being here, he just humps his back at me, and swears he'll turn Turk.' Having obtained the owner's leave to keep the letter, she subsisted on it for days, till Jack returned from his tour of experimental morality, in a fur-lined pelisse and with a waxed moustache, an impressive messenger of woe. Yes, he had seen Moore, and appealed to him as man to man. Moore had been quite civil, and seemed penitent, but refused to come home. It was Jack's belief he was too much ashamed. But the little Frenchman with him, who was doing a ripping picture of some Turks and fountains, had bidden Jack have patience.

'Monsieur Tessier is the best man I ever knew!' cried Olive, clutching at the ray of hope.

''Um, I don't know that I should call him that exactly,' said the moralist, repressing the smile of one who has droll memories, alas! unmentionable. He gave Olive the painter's address, however, at Pera, and she wrote forthwith.

'Will she ever see her husband again?' said the Squire to Maurice, who came down often to preside at family councils. 'We feed her with the hope; but do you honestly think he will ever come back to her?'

'Not while she's in this house. It's too much to ask of any man. Send her out to Montreux again, under the wing of the Pettigrew. She likes her now.'

'Yes, I know. Isn't it strange? This illness seems to have turned her right about. She likes every one she disliked before. When she first came round she cried for Mrs. Elphinstone by the hour, and couldn't bear the sight of Eustace here, or of her old favourite, Emily.'

'The shake-up has done her no end of good,' said Maurice unsentimentally; 'and if they do come together again, she'll stand a better chance of happiness than she did at her marriage. Take my advice, try Montreux.'

'It's an idea!' said the Squire. He might have called it an accomplished fact, ideas suggested by Maurice seldom failing to be put in practice. The Squire came as near to dislike his youngest son as might consist with the paternal

sentiment; Maurice made a joke of things held sacred, even poor Olive's trouble; but Maurice had a head on his shoulders (it was a byword in the family), and his advice, though given sneeringly, was always sound.

Olive was sent to Montreux, without Emily, to the care of Lady Pettigrew, who, in view of her great contrition, received her kindly. She still retained all the manners of an invalid, loving to sit out in the sun and dream, with idle hands.

That was a gala winter for Lady Pettigrew. Never had her friends rallied round her so inspiringly. The hotel was entirely filled with them; and besides Olive, whose sad romantic story reflected merit on a chaperon, she took especial pride in the adherence of her old friend, Georgiana Ettrick Jones, whom she had for years been urging to try the benefit of Montreux air for ailments which may be summarized as a species of refined exhaustion. It had been the prospect of meeting Olive which had finally induced Mrs. Ettrick Jones to brave the perils and discomfitures of foreign travel. She had whimpered at the wreck of Theo's marriage, and endeavoured vainly, through the post, to find out Gertrude with intent to reclaim her. She had heard from Barford gossip—never to be trusted—that Gertrude, on her husband's death, had gone back to that dreadful, vulgar Mr. Gravesey, who, poor old man, was now quite paralysed, a burden to all concerned with him. Theo, she knew, was far away. Her interest in life centring in 'those children,' as she persisted in calling them, and

unable to come at either of the principals, she attached herself to Theo's much-wronged wife.

The gentle voice of Mrs. Ettrick Jones, her pale refinement, the atmosphere of warm sentiment which she exhaled, made Olive take to her as a mild narcotic. To her were confided thoughts too delicate to bear the frost of Lady Pettigrew, and both being invalids, they sat much together on one or other of the hotel balconies, or else in some shelter down by the lake. Lapped in delicious sunlight, screened from all breath of wind, Olive derived solace from the counsels, ghostly and otherwise, of her white-haired friend—counsels interlarded with reminiscences of Theo's childhood—while both threw breadcrumbs to the gulls, which screamed and wheeled and flapped their wings before them. To this friend she showed Paul Tessier's letters as they came; and when at last Paul wrote to say that he had prevailed upon his wayward charge to go to Switzerland, this friend wept for joy, and kissed her repeatedly.

'I have so blamed myself about those children. I ought to have made an effort to look after them, if only for my dear husband's sake; he was so fond of them. But my health, love, has quite crippled me. If I could but see Theo restored to you, and reclaim poor Gertrude, I should die happy.'

Paul's letter was received on a Wednesday. On the following Friday, going out with her friend as usual on fine mornings, Olive caught a glimpse of Paul himself. He assailed the eye,

being clad in a brown velvet coat, a soft white shirt, and very light trousers, the ends of a green tie fluttering beneath his ears, the whole surmounted by the seal of the Oriental—a scarlet fez.

'Gracious!' cried Mrs. Ettrick Jones, as Olive left her side and flew to that strange figure. With a dove-like inquisition the elder lady examined more closely the mien of this gay troubadour, and was prepossessed by what she saw. The eyes, the mouth, the nose, were mischievous truly, but how truly clever! Left alone with him suddenly, she accepted his proffered arm without misgivings.

Olive sauntered in the street of shops, a prey to cruel palpitation, seeing nothing. In her flying interview with Paul she had learnt that Theo was somewhere hereabouts, making purchases. She saw him suddenly, and pretended not to see; he had not yet caught sight of her. He had come out of a shop and was intent to stuff a largish parcel into his jacket-pocket, which was full already. He was smoking a pipe, and looked the picture of thoughtlessness. When, having succeeded in adjusting the parcel so as to bulge his pocket to the utmost, he deigned to look where he was going, her presence dawned on him. He stared, but said nothing, while she passed him by. Then she heard him close behind her, saying:

'Olive!'

'Yes,' she answered, quickening her pace.

'I had no idea you were here, or I should not

have come. But since we have met, may I walk with you ?'

'As you please.'

He walked beside her in silence, overwhelmed by the situation.

'I think your pipe has gone out,' she remarked incisively. 'You'd better stop and relight it.'

He laughed, and she was seized with sudden fury at his impudence in taking it so coolly, this encounter, to which she herself had looked forward with such hope and trembling. He had the effrontery of rude health, an easy conquering air which quite incensed her. It was preposterous in a man so badly dressed, whose pockets, over-laden, swung like panniers.

'Won't you make it up ?' he pleaded.

'No, I will not !' she snapped decidedly, and walked the faster. His facility, his stupid trust in her good nature, as if it had been a casual nod he asked of her, put pride in arms. She knew, too, that denial was the lead to hold him ; he would cleave to her in remonstrance or argument, and she felt herself his match at either.

In a cold preoccupation she heard his apology. It was mere self-excuse—an implied 'you did it.' Then, when he had quite done speaking, she turned abruptly and blazed scorn upon him. She showed him to himself as she beheld him—unclean, unfaithful, needing her forgiveness ere ever he could hold up his head again before decent people. And she could see that it came as a shock to him that she should deem herself the aggrieved person ; he had never thought it

possible! Yet he admitted the justice of her view, now that it was presented, up to a certain point; but she exaggerated. As of old, he must needs argue; when, her option being either to laugh or cry, she laughed with all the scorn that she could muster, saying:

'Don't appeal to my reason, please; I have none where you're concerned.'

At last, it seemed, he understood, for he stopped talking, and pounced upon her hand, which she snatched away, declaring the place too populous for such approaches. Her giving a reason for the withdrawal implied surrender. Broken words escaped him. He appeared seriously discomposed, and she wondered why, being herself in full possession of her faculties. Indeed, her feelings on the occasion were so far from rapture that she felt ashamed to go back to her hotel lest friends should notice her disappointment. The most she had recovered was the old antagonism, the insane desire to conquer and control this untamed man. But she had determined evermore to curb that strong desire, which was her love, and play a part to please him.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE PEACEMAKER

Then began for Olive an era of self-restraint, of repression of every impulse of her despotic love for Theo. She gave him full liberty, she feigned equanimity whatever he did; she smiled when she could have wept or killed him, smiled when she would have laughed out scornfully, smiled when he blessed the change in her, smiled when he entered, when he left, a room. This continual deception cramped and bruised her like a suit of mail; but her husband was content as never before.

The influence of the Cumnor family, added to that of his friends in Constantinople, obtained for him without difficulty the appointment of vice-consul at an obscure and wellnigh defunct seaport on the confines of Syria and Asia Minor—a place Olive lothed at first sight. On either side the town stretched wastes of sand, and, when a south wind blew, sand swirled over the town, and found its way through the lattices into every room. When Theo took her for a gallop on those sands, she was sickened by the sight of many skeletons of dead animals, and sometimes a fresh carcass with the lean dogs tearing at it. There

was no society. The French vice-consul, Theo's only European colleague, was a dipsomaniac. A few half-bred, slipshod Levantine women came fawning round her, to her great disgust. The eternal sun grew nauseous, as too much of one sweet. The natives were monkeys or devils, according to the mood upon her, never men. But Theo liked their ways, was pleased with everything, absurdly proud of his own consequence as representing England in that ghastly spot; and so long as he was content she would not murmur. For six years, enlivened only by occasional visits to England, she never once broke down, giving heed to her health as to all else demanded of her. It was only in the delirium of typhoid fever that her mask fell at length, and Theo, who nursed her devotedly, realized the intensity of her hatred for the dirt, the smells, the sinister brown faces, and of her longing for a crowd of English people. As soon as she was well enough to stand the journey, he sent her home. On the eve of her departure, he observed:

'You let out, in delirium, that you still imagine that I write to Gertrude. It's an effort for me to speak her name. I have never written to her since a certain period, nor she to me. We're more than dead to one another. I'm afraid I can't make it clear to you; but we were brother and sister till that time in Switzerland, and now we don't know what we are; we daren't face it. Sooner than see her again I'd do almost anything you could mention, and I expect she feels the same. So set your mind at rest on that point.'

Olive nodded; but his assurance, by excess of emphasis, only disturbed her mind the more. He must have thought of Gertrude constantly, have kept the evil ever fresh in his mind, to feel such burning shame after all these years. As of old, she was jealous of each thought he spent away from her. And it seemed hard that, in spite of all her acting, all her self-denial, he should still regard that woman with such extravagant reverence; still cheating her, as he had always done, of what was hers. But she hid her thoughts, as she had learnt to do, and, though sad at parting from him, did not cry. Tears only vexed him; Gertrude never cried. She was always conscious of being tried by a standard not her own, another type altogether, and, of course, found wanting.

At Sandset there was grave concern for her ill looks, and discussion of what might be done to hasten her complete recovery. The family doctor advised a sojourn of some weeks upon the North Welsh coast, and it was decided to send her there in charge of Emily. There was a place that Maurice swore by, the Squire remembered—a place with golf-links—Llan something or other; he forgot the name, though he had often had to write to Maurice there. Maurice hardly went anywhere else out of London. The name of the place was ascertained, and rooms were engaged. Eustace would have liked to accompany the invalid, but could not, for, in the failure of his father's powers, he managed everything. Jack, resident with his Mary at the Manor Farm, the father of three sturdy infants, had no interests

outside his own home. In the years which had elapsed since his marriage, he had quite thrown off the moralist, and was now, if anything, a trifle free in his talk to ladies. Maurice, since his wife's death, came rarely to Sandset, though he still advised the Squire and Eustace in matters of business. As he had a very large fortune at his entire disposal, and was advancing rapidly to fame, his elder brothers would have died sooner than incur, however unjustly, the suspicion of 'sucking up' to him. They decided he was a 'swell,' and dropped his acquaintance. Mrs. Cumnor, alone of the family, had undergone no perceptible change. She still reclined on sofas, bringing the same wide, searching gaze to bear on all who entered, while Eustace waited on her hand and foot, exactly as of yore.

Olive was glad to say good-bye to them all, for they spoke of Theo as an utter scamp, and her heart was always with him in his exile, asking if he thought of her at certain moments, sadly suspecting that, if he thought of any woman, it was Gertrude. She could have dispensed with the attendance of Emily, though the maid spared no effort to make her comfortable. The Welsh mountains reminding her of Switzerland, she took a mournful pleasure in the sight of them, and wandered much alone upon their nether slopes, and by the sea, sometimes stopping out so long that Emily began to fear the worst for her.

One morning, as she was exploring a way quite new to her—a road, not yet macadamized,

leading up between building-plots to the brow of a hill on which a single villa, built of dark stone and roofed with slate, rose gaunt out of half-grown shrubberies—a portly gentleman came trotting down the hill towards her, dragged in triumph by a little girl. The child was laughing merrily at her companion, who made his exertions comical to please her, waddling like a duck, then hopping, with broad grimaces. It amazed her, drawing near, to behold in this buffoon her brother Maurice, a man regarded as certain of the next vacant judgeship. Recognizing his sister, Maurice strained at gravity.

'You're going up to see her?' he exclaimed. The voice was eager, not a bit like Maurice. 'That's forgiving, and she'll be delighted. She's often wished to see you. Eustace wrote me word that you were somewhere in Wales, but I didn't expect to see you here. It's my home practically. I run down whenever I can spare a minute, putting up at the hotel, though she has paid me the compliment of wishing I would stay in the house. Olive, be good to her, for there never was such a woman! She's refused me twenty times, and each refusal opens worlds to me. I could achieve anything coming fresh from her. . . .'

The little girl, having tugged in vain at Maurice, had come to Olive and taken her hand lovingly, frowning defiance at her recreant knight. Strangely moved by the act of confidence, Olive at this point looked down into Theo's eyes. She flung away the child's hand

fiercely, and walked back whence she came, stumbling, blind, in the endeavour to repress emotion. So Gertrude dwelt up there with Theo's child. She had not known there was a child till now. Theo must never know.

She sat in the lodging-house parlour, and tried to read, but could not for those eyes still haunting her. Theo's daughter had come to her instinctively, in perfect trustfulness; it was a gracious action, and she longed for the girl to be hers with a fervour passing human, with the instinct of intense need. And yet she must hate the dear little thing, for the possession of a child exalted Gertrude. Theo, if he got to know, would honour Gertrude. Nature would speak in him, and he would spurn his wife aside as something useless.

She endured this torment until late in the afternoon, when she could endure no longer, but retraced her steps of the morning and reached the gate admitting to the gaunt new villa. The view up there was glorious. Taking her courage in both hands, she pushed open the gate and walked up the short gravelled drive to the front-door. It was opened by Gertrude herself before she could knock.

'I knew you would come after what Maurice told me this morning. He had to bring her home, she cried so bitterly. I'm afraid she hasn't learnt to bear rebuffs. You won't punish her for my fault, will you? And Theo must not know of her existence. Promise that, please!'

In a pleasant sitting-room, with sunset lighting it through three tall windows, Olive recovered

wits sufficient to look about her. With her arm round Gertrude, she felt happy, in close touch with Theo; quite sure that, at last, she was doing all he could have wished.

'Where's the peacemaker?' she inquired quite merrily.

'I expect she's just outside the door, waiting to be allowed to come in and say she's sorry. I told her it was very rude to pounce like that on strangers. We've had tears about it, and she's truly penitent. You may come in, Dora!'

THE END

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